Some Suggestions on the Criteria for Basic, Good and Outstanding Level of Teaching

Background

In the paper that follows, the recommendations and perspectives are not meant to be strictly prescriptive, nor are they exhaustive. Teaching is a complex, multi-dimensional, interactive activity which needs to be evaluated using multiple sources, and with an appreciation of the fact that there are differences between disciplines and various teaching contexts. However, it is intended that this paper provides some important elements of various 'levels' of teaching.

An obvious, but nevertheless crucial, point to make is that "good" teaching develops "good" learning in students. That "good" learning involves several elements.

- Subject-based or disciplinary knowledge that forms the basis of future professional practice and employment for a majority of students

- Critical and creative thinking and the ability to appropriately apply professional knowledge in a broader context that takes into account social, ethical, and other factors.

- General competencies which will be required in employment and daily life: e.g., communication and presentation skills; problem-solving skills, bi-literacy and tri-lingualism; leadership; entrepreneurship; etc.

- Possibly most important of all is the development of an attitude and skills to *continue* learning, as a lifelong process.

The discussion below is intended to serve as a general framework for academic staff members, Heads of Departments and Deans.

Evaluation of Teaching

Evaluation of any complex activity (such as teaching) involves at least two stages:

1. Determining what makes up the activity in total;

2. Gathering relevant information about each of the activities and making judgments based on that information.

Below, each of these matters is addressed in turn.

1. What constitutes the activity of "Teaching"?

Essentially "teaching" can be categorised as four [related] sets of activities, as follows.

A. Preparing for teaching

This may involve some or all of the following:

- Deciding upon learning objectives and subject content

- Organising content into a coherent and meaningful sequence

- Organising the sequence into appropriate Sections

- Deciding upon appropriate learning tasks and activities, and organising these

- Deciding upon teaching methods to be used and ensuring that these are used appropriately
- Accessing / developing / producing teaching materials for use in formal sessions
- Developing and producing materials and resources for student use

B.   *Interacting with students:*

Staff / student interactions take place in formal classes, and in out-of-class settings. The following are activities commonly carried out by teachers.

- Lecturing to students
- Conducting tutorials, discussions, etc. with students
- Supervising students in laboratories, workshops and studios
- Visiting and supporting students during field studies, clinical and industrial placements
- Supervising students' projects
- Obtaining feedback from students regarding their perceptions of the teaching - and acting appropriately in the light of that feedback
- Personal consultations with students (e.g. during Office Hours)
- Ad hoc and informal discussions with students

C.   *Assessing students' work and giving feedback on it.*

Some typical activities are the following.

- Developing assessment criteria and conveying these to students
- Deciding upon, developing and setting tests, assignments and examinations
- Marking students' work, including the development of marking schemes
- Giving feedback to students: in written or oral form
- Statistical profiling of students' performance
- Formal documenting of results

D.   *"Other activities"*

Obviously, there is a wide and varied list of activities which could validly be included here; the following are some examples.

- Collecting feedback (e.g. from colleagues) on the effectiveness of teaching, and acting appropriately on that feedback
- Submitting proposals for educational development projects, and carrying out projects effectively when applications are successful
- Participating in research and other scholarly activities that directly support teaching
- Engaging in professional development activities in order to stay up-to-date and credible in the subject or discipline
- Developing teaching materials, including publishing books
- Attending conferences, symposia, workshops relating to teaching and learning
- Self-study of appropriate materials
- Playing a management / leadership role in subject or programme developments
- "Guest" lecturing in other institutions and subjects

It is important to note that the lists above are meant to be indicative rather than strictly prescriptive or exhaustive, and will certainly vary according to the context.

2.   Criteria and Sources of Information

Some examples of criteria / sources of information which might be used in relation to the various activities are given below, together with suggestions as to who might be in a good position to comment validly on the information.

Preparation for Teaching

- Extent to which varied teaching and learning activities are appropriately employed to stimulate students to think deeply with and about important concepts and theories in their respective disciplines
- Extent to which meaningful learning tasks are appropriately designed to challenge students to ask questions, think, apply, and evaluate their new understanding and skills
- Extent to which strategies are appropriately used to encourage students to learn collaboratively inside and outside the classroom
- Extent to which the material is relevant and up-to-date
- Inclusion of relevant examples in teaching sessions
- Use of appropriate visual material
- Handouts (including subject outlines)
- Extent to which learning objectives for sessions are conveyed to students
- Extent to which sessions run smoothly and to time
- Additional resource material to which students are referred
- etc.

Comments on these matters might usefully be made by:

Students   - via SFQ and other standardised questionnaires
              - via other feedback forms or procedures
              - in staff / student consultative committees

Colleagues   - as a result of classroom visits / knowledge of materials produced

Others   - via examination of Teaching Portfolios or other materials

Interacting with students

Here the prime criterion is that the staff member, in his / her interactions with students, is able to assist them to learn. Associated with this are the following aspects:
- Setting clear and realistic learning goals for students
- Motivating, and helping students to develop insights
- Assisting students who have difficulties with understanding subject matter
- Enthusing students

- Inspiring and stimulating students to think critically and creatively, and apply new knowledge
- Involving students in more active forms of learning
- Promoting interactions between teacher and students, and between students and their peers both inside and outside the classroom
- Communicating clearly with students
- Collecting feedback from students and acting appropriately on the basis of it
- Empathising with students' difficulties and supporting them as appropriate
- Being available to students outside formal classes

Students are in the best position to comment on these matters (via SFQ and other less formal procedures), though colleagues who attend teaching sessions can also provide useful feedback.

Assessing students' work and giving feedback on it

The main focus here is the extent to which authentic and challenging methods of assessment are appropriately used to challenge students to think about and reflect on their learning experiences, demonstrate their competence in authentic tasks, and to develop the ability to assess their own as well as other people's work. Associated with this are the following aspects:

- Extent to which assessment tasks are consistent with subject objectives
- Extent to which assignments encourage learning for understanding
- Range and appropriateness of assignments
- Clarity of assessment criteria conveyed to students
- Quality of feedback given to students
- Consistency and fairness of marking procedures
- Quality of students' assignments
- Students' examination performance

Colleagues and external examiners are in the best position to give feedback on the majority of these matters. However, students are in a strong position to make comments about some.

"Other activities"

- Successful submission of proposals for educational development projects
- Engaging in and completing educational development projects
- Research publications and other scholarly products relating to teaching
- Attendance at Workshops and Seminars that relate to teaching and learning
- Attendance / Presentations at Conferences relating to teaching and learning
- Course and subject leader responsibilities
- Invited presentations at other institutions or in courses outside the department
- Membership of Committees/ Working Groups concerned with teaching and learning development

Colleagues and Heads of Department are probably in the best position to make comments about the quality and usefulness of the activities listed under this heading.

3. Overall Expectations

Overall, the quality of teaching performance may perhaps be thought of in terms of three broad categories:

- Basic competence in teaching
- Good teaching
- Outstanding teaching

Defining or describing exactly what is meant by each of these is problematical, and is more properly a matter of informed professional judgment (taking into account what has been written above), rather than the application of any objective "formula" or set of rules. There is also the difficulty of combining judgments about the quality of performance vis a vis the four sets of teaching activities referred to above: and the "quality of teaching" for each of the sets of activities is located on a continuum, rather than being a difference in kind.

Nevertheless, in order to come to an overall view about the quality of teaching, the quality of the separate activities must somehow be combined into a <u>holistic</u> professional perspective. Some features that might be associated with each of the levels of teaching quality are offered below. Again, it must be stressed that these are broad descriptions, rather than tight prescriptions.

Basic Competence in Teaching

The staff member is expected to

- Maintain a sound command of up-to-date professional / disciplinary knowledge
- Prepare teaching sessions diligently and appropriately, taking into account the background of students and the learning objectives to be achieved.
- Produce useful teaching resources and handout materials for students
- Be able to use effectively a variety of teaching methods in response to different teaching contexts
- Stimulate students to think and to apply the new understanding and skills in exploring and dealing with real-life problems
- Engage students actively in meaningful learning tasks that require them to ask questions, think, discuss, apply and evaluate their new understanding and skills
- Facilitate and support students to learn outside the classroom through interacting with their teachers, peers, and other people
- Communicate clearly with students
- Demonstrate a concern that students should come to understand the subject matter
- Be available, and approachable, for consultations by students
- Use a variety of assessment procedures that promote effective learning
- Mark work diligently and fairly, and gives useful feedback to students
- Obtain reasonably good feedback from students and colleagues relating to teaching
- Use feedback from students and other stakeholders to plan and put into action improvements in teaching

Good Teaching

Naturally, "Good" teaching involves all of the elements that have been detailed above for "Basic Competence", but the "quality" of these would be expected to be rather higher.

In addition, some of the following would normally be associated with "Good" teaching.

- Involvement in subject / programme development and administration
- Adopting a thoughtful / reflective approach to teaching
- Involvement in teaching development projects
- Attempting at solving problems of "difficult" teaching situations

Outstanding Teaching

Again, the elements of "Good" teaching would naturally be incorporated in "Outstanding" teaching, and usually at a much higher level and over an extended period.

In addition, "outstanding" teachers might also have the following qualities.

- Anticipating and taking a proactive role in meeting changing conditions so as to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning
- Inspiring students and colleagues to aim for the highest standards in teaching and learning.
- Involvement in promoting excellence in teaching among colleagues
- Adopting a scholarly approach to teaching and learning as evidenced in the "products" of that scholarship (publications, teaching materials, etc.)

And above all, "Good teaching is teaching not only with the mind, but also with the heart." (Inspired by the book: *What Makes a Good Teacher?* UNESCO Publications, 1996).

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