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Why are conferences about teaching and learning in higher education – all over the world – attracting so many participants? Just like the NU-conference. There are, of course, many personal reasons and arguments why you would decide to come to a conference with a focus on teaching and learning in higher education.

But there are also several answers to my question that have structural explanations.

First, student numbers are increasing while funding is decreasing so we have to be more efficient.

Second, widening participation has led to new student groups, creating challenges for teachers.

Third, there has been a dramatic expansion in the range of courses and programmes in higher education and more exacting demands for high quality teaching to facilitate learning

Fourth, there is tough global competition for students today. We have to be excellent to be selected, both as teachers and as universities.

Fifth, as we can see from many of the seminars at this conference, new technologies are changing teaching and learning environments.

New technologies widen the repertoire of approaches to teaching but they do not replace traditional face to face learning. The classical dialogue, the critical seminar and the individual presentation are all thriving alongside streamed lectures, social networking, Apps, Blended Learning, E-learning and Web 2, to name a few.

One question we always have to ask ourselves – no matter tools – is what we do to help our students to learn to the best of their ability. Have the students really understood course concepts and can they integrate and apply what we teach? We know through extensive research that skilled teachers focus on enhancing understanding and facilitating student learning. They ask themselves how their approaches to teaching will impact on student learning.

They check student understanding and if they see that students are not acquiring the intended knowledge, skills and approaches, they try to find new ways of helping students to learn. They work patiently and systematically.

But, it is not enough to have skilled teachers in higher education. We all know that the students own learning has to be the main focus. How do they actually learn – regardless of technology - when they learn?

I think that teaching and learning is far too complex and important to be left to chance.

That's why higher education needs support from the top, from government. You can't expect a single university teacher or perhaps even a single university to be able to develop fundamental structures for excellent teaching and learning. Some countries have set up advanced programmes to develop teaching and learning in higher education, as have international organisations like the OECD and the EU. They invest billions of EUROS in these programmes.

One good example – among many - is the UK where the government runs the programme "Effective learning and teaching in UK higher education". Another example is the OECD programme "The path to quality teaching in higher education". There are four key questions

within this OECD programme: What is Quality Teaching? Why is it important in higher education? How can teaching concretely be enhanced? How can one make sure quality teaching is effective?

To contribute to the goals of Europe 2020, the European Commission recently published a new agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems. Guess what one of the main goals is? To improve the quality and relevance of teaching and learning!

I think the Swedish government has to be more proactive on this issue. The Research and Innovation Bill (Forskningspropositionen) – presented last week – creates the impression that innovation can be a consequence of excellent research. Of course that is the case. But aren't the links between education and innovation equally strong? As I see it, excellent teaching and learning will also stimulate a lot of innovation

Yet education is absent from the Research and Innovation Bill - I think this is a mistake. For instance, the expression "Doctoral programs" is mentioned 70 times, but never in relation to teaching or learning. The expression "Pedagogy in Higher Education" is mentioned once. On page 206 in Appendix 9. If the government really values quality in teaching and learning in higher education, the message should be clear. Why not a bill on "Excellence in teaching and learning" next time?

Let me finish with a quote from Leonard Cohen: "There is a crack in everything... that's how the light gets in ...."

You are the light. So, keep on developing structures and tools for teaching and learning.