
Good teaching at university

Knowledge and inspiration for teachers and management

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Introduction

How can university education promote learning outcomes, well-being and completion in education? This is the big question that EVA has set out to answer with a series of studies of students', managers' and teachers' experiences of attending university as well as a series of three knowledge briefs based on research points and knowledge about the social environments of teaching and the organisation and physical environment of university education.

The work on learning outcomes, well-being and increased completion is particularly relevant as these years, the universities welcome more and more students from different backgrounds. When about one in four young people is admitted to university, the students also have several different professional and personal prerequisites for starting a university education. So how can universities ensure a high academic level and get as many students involved as possible so that they thrive while studying and ultimately complete their education?

EVA's study of students' learning outcomes, well-being and completion shows that there are four factors that are particularly closely related to both grades, well-being and drop-out rates at universities. In Danish, we call them the FEST factors, and they cover Academic engagement (F), Self-Efficacy (E), Collaboration (S) and the experience of Belonging (T) while studying.

The results indicate that the four FEST factors have a major impact on how the students perform. This highlights the importance of universities prioritising teaching, organisation, the study environment and the physical environment in ways that provide the FEST factors with the best possible conditions.

Many education institutions are already engaged in efforts to strengthen aspects of the study environment that support learning outcomes, well-being and completion – including in relation to an increasingly diverse student population. However, the experience with these initiatives is rarely systematically studied, and thus there is no overall knowledge base for working with it systematically.

The goal of the three knowledge briefs is to gather and present existing knowledge and research on the ways in which universities and educational programmes can enhance students' learning outcomes, well-being and completion through initiative related to the study environment and teaching and bring this into discussions within the programmes while highlighting particular considerations and points of attention.



Content of the brief

The knowledge brief focuses on *teaching* that strengthens the students' motivation, engagement and learning. Based on the literature in the field, we understand *good teaching* as teaching that creates the conditions for students to achieve the learning objectives of the programme and simultaneously supporting their well-being, academic development and personal education while studying.

There is no single recipe for good teaching, as learning takes place through complex processes that depend, among other things, on the students' interests and prerequisites for learning, the relationship with the teacher, the teaching situation, the study environment, etc. Thus, good teaching will vary depending on the context, where academic and didactic aspects play a key role in good teaching. However, the existing research literature also points to some general didactic and educational principles that are useful to consider across different educational contexts. Based on selected research literature in the field, this brief examines which general didactic and educational principles are important for creating good teaching at universities.

Structure of the brief

The brief is structured in two chapters. The first chapter unfolds five principles underlying good teaching, which according to research supports the general premise of focusing on the student's learning process and promoting learning for understanding. The next chapter is a theoretical review of literature and important research points about good teaching.

Basis of the brief

The literature forming the basis for this brief is drawn from both classical contributions to university education and recent research. The literature search is based on several complementary approaches to ensure a broad and systematic knowledge base. Focus has been on recent, recognised research in higher education with a broad general didactic aim. The selection of literature is qualified and supported by recommendations from an expert group that has identified both specific researchers and key publications.

The FEST Factors

EVA's analyses show that four factors are closely associated with academic achievement, well-being, and completion.

The four factors are:

- F Academic Engagement**
Academic engagement concerns students' interest in the academic content, whether they perceive it as relevant and useful, and the extent to which they actively work with the material.
- E Efficacy (self-efficacy)**
Efficacy refers to students' belief in their own abilities and their expectation of succeeding academically.
- S Collaboration**
Collaboration concerns students' experience of the general level of academic collaboration within their programme.
- T Belonging**
Sense of belonging refers to students' experience of feeling that they belong in their programme and that they are part of a broader academic community.

Read more about the FEST factors in:
Hvad fremmer fagligt udbytte, trivsel og gennemførelse på universiteter?
(EVA, 2026a)

5 teaching principles that promote learning outcomes and well-being

EVA's study of students' learning outcomes, well-being and completion indicates that academic engagement, self-efficacy, collaboration and the experience of belonging are of great importance to the student. This chapter examines in more detail how to teach in ways that strengthen these aspects and thus also the students' learning process. The chapter is divided into a number of general didactic principles for good teaching that apply across courses.

FIRST PRINCIPLE

Good teaching is when the student can see the common thread



A clear direction in teaching and coherence between teaching and assessment formats is essential to strengthen the students' academic engagement and motivation. When teaching is structured with a clear purpose and a clear common thread in the academic progression, it is easier for the students to form an overview, control their learning process and understand how different aspects are connected. This makes teaching more meaningful and motivating because students can focus on specific goals and experience progression (Andersen, 2010; Biggs, 1996; Cohen, 1987; Pintrich, 2003; Tabor & Von Müllen, 2020).

Students should also experience that the content of the teaching contributes to the overall learning outcomes and the objective of the programme (Ulriksen, 2021; Ulriksen et al., 2017; Ulriksen & Gregersen, 2022). This could strengthen their motivation for active participation (Rienecker et al., 2015; Ulriksen, 2002). In addition to ensuring that coherence and progression are considered in the design of the programme's academic components

(see also the brief "Organisation and physical environment at the university", EVA 2026), it is advisable for teachers to continuously make the academic content meaningful by relating it to other elements of the course or programme and the broader knowledge structures within the course (Rienecker et al., 2015; Ulriksen, 2021 pp. 35-37). These relationships may seem obvious to the teacher, but are often more unclear to the students (Ulriksen, 2021, p. 63). For example, it will not be obvious to all psychology students why they should learn statistics. It contributes to a deeper understanding for students when the teacher explicitly explains how the overall objectives of the programme, for example, enable them to apply theoretical knowledge in complex, practical contexts.

A clear, consistent and transparent teaching approach that integrates learning objectives, activities and assessment formats can significantly enhance the students' academic engagement, motivation and learning for understanding (Andersen, 2010; Biggs, 1996).

EXAMPLE

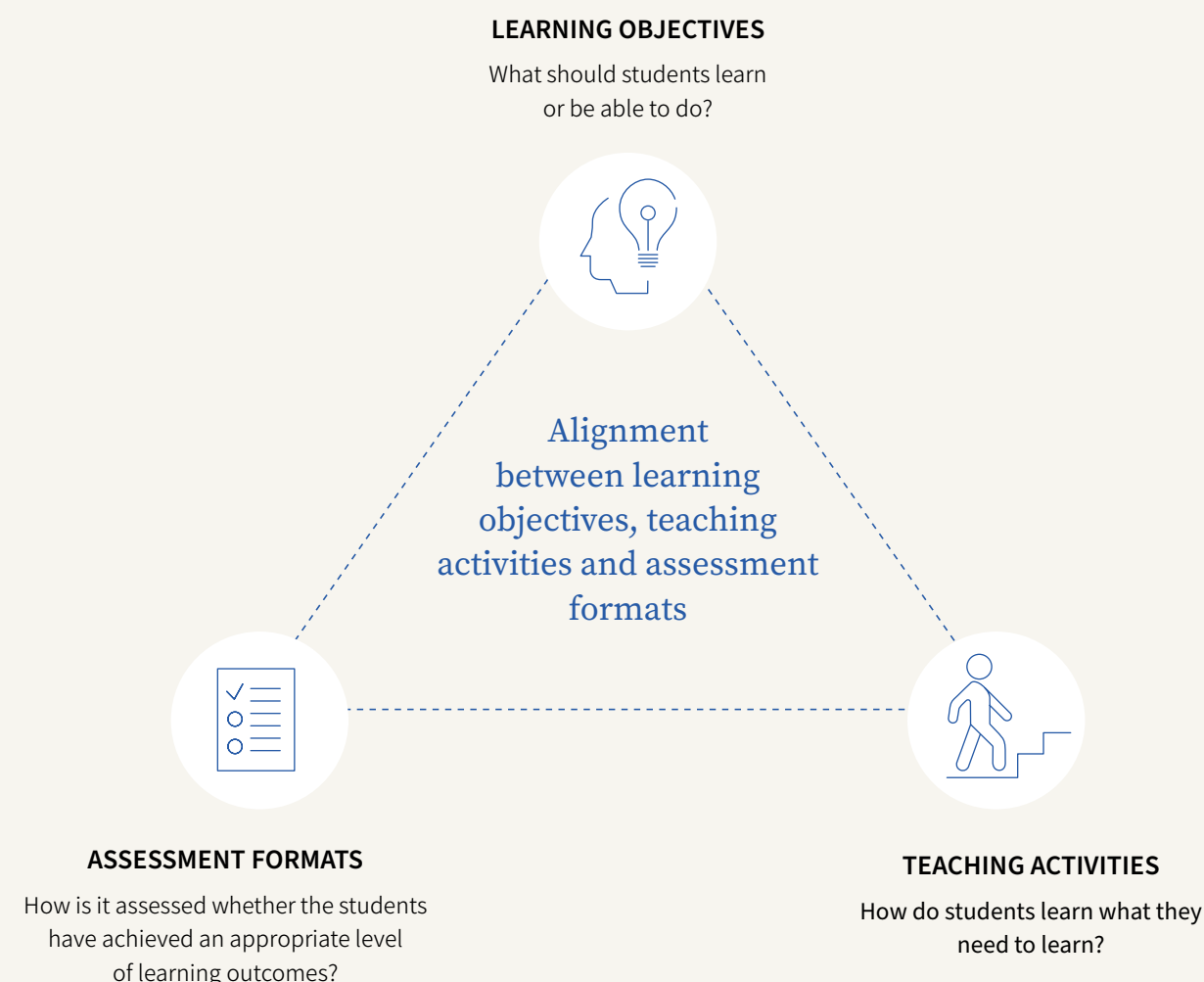
How to help students get started

Both in terms of motivation and learning objectives, student guidance is essential to, for example, help students break a complex problem into manageable bits or limit the problem formulation to the given resources (Felder & Brent, 2016).

Furthermore, it should not be assumed that students naturally prefer, for example, problem-based learning, and the curiosity and independence fostered by the teaching approach sometimes need to be proactively promoted through teaching.

This can be supported, for example, by the teacher "kickstarting" a problem formulation with a common brainstorm, where the plenary discusses any current societal challenges related to the field of study. This may help increase student engagement and foster their curiosity and ability to work independently.

FIGURE 1 — Relationship between learning objectives, teaching activities and assessment formats



SOURCE: BIGGS & TANG, 2011.

Learning objectives, teaching and assessment format must be clearly linked

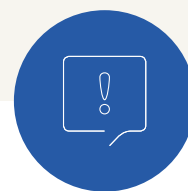
In order to strengthen motivation, academic engagement and self-efficacy, it is important that the teaching has well-defined learning objectives that are clearly communicated to the students. Learning activities should be planned in accordance with the learning objectives to ensure a clear correlation between what the students must achieve and the way the teaching is delivered (Biggs, 1996; Martin, 2011). In addition, the assessment formats must reflect the desired competences so that students can clearly see how their efforts and learning are assessed, which may increase motivation and support a deeper understanding (Cohen, 1987; Dalsgaard & Ryberg, 2022). The assessment format has a significant impact on the

students' focus, motivation and learning strategies (Bjælde et al., 2017; Troelsen & Dohn, 2014).

In short, it is about creating *alignment* between learning objectives, teaching activities and assessment formats (Cohen, 1987; Biggs, 1996; Martin, 2011; Andersen, 2010; Tabor & Von Müllen, 2020; Dalsgaard & Ryberg, 2022). The idea behind alignment was developed by educational psychologist John B. Biggs.

As can be seen from the figure here, alignment is about a clear match between the competences you want to promote in the student, the teaching approach and how the students are assessed and tested.

For example, if a learning objective for a methodology course is for students to be able to design and execute a questionnaire survey, reading methodology literature is



Points of attention when working with the common thread in teaching:

This first principle underlines the importance of the teacher clarifying the context of the teaching.

- 1 Make the common thread quite clear by, for example, starting and ending a coursework by briefly pointing out: *What is the objective? Where are we in the course/programme?* It is helpful to explicitly explain how today's topic connects to previous or upcoming topics.
- 2 Formulate a clear correlation between learning objectives, activities and the exam by, for example, sharing the learning objectives with the students and actively referring to them: *"We do this now because it trains you to..."*
- 3 Use the assessment format actively where it makes sense, for example by talking to the students about how the teaching activities help them get ready for this particular exam.
- 4 Help the students connect the exam to broader objectives, such as application in practice, further academic development or understanding of broader contexts in the course.

not enough. The students should also have the opportunity to work with the design and implementation of questionnaires in practice, and the assessment format should test their competence in designing and conducting a questionnaire survey.

Knowledge of the assessment format can motivate engagement in teaching activities

If the students can see that the teaching activities help them develop competences necessary for the exam, they will often become more motivated to engage. That effect is called the backwash effect, where the assessment format defines the approach to the academic material. Well-designed exams can motivate students to an appro-

priate approach to learning, but assessment formats may also risk promoting inappropriate approaches to the academic material that do not contribute to the student's actual learning, but only good exam results (Biggs, 1996; Troelsen & Dohn, 2014). Exams and learning objectives should not govern teaching to the extent that they undermine learning for understanding – for example, if the learning process is reduced to a check list of what students are expected to be able to do (Andersen, 2010; Loughlin et al., 2021). Assessment format and learning objectives are often specified in the curriculum, and the extent to which individual teachers can influence them varies. However, in order to avoid an inappropriate approach to the learning process, the teacher can talk openly with the students about the relationship between exam and course teaching (Rienecker et al., 2015, pp. 369-370).

TEACHER:

I need to be so inspiring that students choose to show up and engage

It is about creating and performing a joint social contract. The students must participate, but in return, as a teacher, I must ensure that participation is valuable and strengthens their own learning and development, says Jaume Castan Pinos, associate professor of international and regional politics at the Department of Political Science at the University of Southern Denmark.

What is your objective of prioritising teaching?

“ To be so inspiring that students choose to show up and commit to the courses. It is not mandatory for students to be physically present at the university. If they do not feel inspired, they can always choose to study at home. Therefore, I have to constantly ask myself: "Is this course interesting enough for them to want to stay for the whole class? Is it interesting enough for them to want to come back again next week?"

How do you create an engaging learning environment in class?

“ In my experience, it is crucial to establish a culture of academic engagement. On the first day, I ask the students a lot of questions to find a connection between my teaching and their lives and experiences. It is my responsibility to create dialogue and discussion, even when we are gathered in large groups. It's never just about giving a lecture. I encourage students to come up with specific examples from their own lives that they can relate to the theories I bring up and we then discuss these. I create space for interaction and engagement instead of being the one who just "dances solo". I usually say that "we dance together" in class.

“ It is my responsibility to create dialogue and discussion, even when we are gathered in large groups. It's never just about giving a lecture.

JAUME CASTAN PINOS

How do students react to your methods?

” In many courses and many year groups only 30 % of the students attend classes in the second week after the start of the semester. But my courses differ – here, participation is closer to 90 %. In addition, feedback from surveys shows that they find my teaching interesting and inspiring. I also invest a lot of time in preparing myself. If what I have planned does not capture the interest of my students, I immediately try something else.

Why is academic engagement in teaching so important?

” It is about creating and performing a joint social contract. The students must participate, but in return, as a teacher, I must ensure that they experience that participation is valuable and strengthens their own learning and development. For example, mandatory assignments are only common in the first semester, but even though I have encountered some resistance from the study board, I insist that they continue. Because I am convinced that when students are active participants, they learn more and understand the material even better.

What is your ultimate objective for your students?

” They need to learn more than just writing assignments. They must be prepared for reality in society, where they must be able to communicate and present. If they are not present with their fellow students, they lose the opportunity to be part of the discussions that shape their understanding of theories, topics and ideas. In my experience, the few who are not present in my classes lack that experience, although they may be able to achieve a good grade.



WE ASKED:

Jaume Castan Pinos is an associate professor of international and regional politics at the Department of Political Science at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). He has won a number of awards for his teaching, including SDU's Lecturer of the Year (2023) and the Teaching Award (2024), which is awarded by the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

SECOND PRINCIPLE

Good teaching includes active forms of learning



Teaching where students work actively with the academic material, participate in the classes and are in dialogue with other students and with the teacher can both promote well-being and learning for understanding. However, this requires that students are encouraged to reflect on the experience they gain when working with the academic material (Mørkved, 2019).

Processing and understanding information and knowledge takes time, and students can better remember and use the academic material in other contexts if they are allowed to work with it themselves. Teaching that actively involves the students also gives the teacher a better opportunity to gain insight into the students' learning process. Through exercises, assignments, activities and dialogue with the students, the teacher can gain insight into how the students understand and use the knowledge presented to them. The teacher can then better adapt the teaching to the students' level and competences and manage how the students work with the material (Ulriksen, 2021, pp. 304-305).

The teacher shares the responsibility for the learning process with the students

By working actively with the academic material, students become participants in the discovery of knowledge rather than passive recipients (Åkerlind, 2004). In this way, students are involved in and gain more autonomy over their own learning process, in turn strengthening their motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). On the other hand, it also gives the students greater responsibility (Felder & Brent, 2016; Ulriksen, 2021). Some students become motivated and engaged by being able to interact with others and bring their competences into play in class, but for other students it can seem overwhelming. Therefore, it is especially important for active learning that the teacher proactively works to create an inclusive learning environment where everyone feels safe to participate. In addition, it may be a good idea to articulate the purpose of a given active form of learning and its learning potential to the students. Taking responsibility for one's own learning process and competence development is both a competence in itself, which enables continued lifelong learning for students after completing formal education, and it also helps to promote learning while studying (OECD, 2018; Tabor & Von Müllen, 2020). One can also refer to it as "self-regulated learning," which is not solely the student's responsibility, but can be supported by the surrounding environment. This can be done, for example, through good feedback practices that support reflection on one's own work (EVA, 2020a; Tabor & Von Müllen, 2020).

” I like it when the professor interacts with the students. The brain is not activated properly if you just read from PowerPoint – you want to be activated during class!

STUDENTS ABOUT BEING ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN TEACHING

EXAMPLE

Students meet different requirements within the same field of study

In the article about the implicit student (*Den implicitte studerende*), educational researcher Lars Ulriksen uses an example from Roskilde University (RUC) to illustrate how students should navigate between different implicit expectations within the same field of study.

Ulriksen shows how project work and course teaching in a programme at RUC follow different academic logics that create different expectations for the students (Ulriksen, 2004, pp. 54-55).

Both types of teaching contain criteria and requirements that are not always communicated explicitly to the students.

The project work is characterised by a high degree of student control and often implied criteria for the project report, which the students must try to decode through the project guide and assessment criteria. In addition, there is an expectation that the students know what they want with the project and can work as an independent group.

Conversely, the course teaching is characterised by a high degree of teacher management and clearer criteria. But also in this type of teaching, a number of implicit expectations are often included, for example to the students' interaction with the teacher and each other.

EXAMPLE

Problem-based and problem-oriented teaching can promote learning for understanding

One type of teaching that can promote learning for understanding is problem-based and problem-oriented teaching (Ulriksen, 2021, pp. 345-346). Firstly, because that way of teaching may increase students' academic engagement and in-depth approach to learning, as students will have to engage and use their own knowledge to analyse, understand or solve the problem instead of just memorising something. In addition, contradictions and paradoxes may arise in the practical work with the course, and this creates a good basis for the students to engage critically in the course. Secondly, working with a problem creates contexts for use and practice outside the programme, as the academic material is related to a complex real-world context.

Furthermore, this form of work more closely resembles how the course translates to a work situation, and the students thus develop competences that are relevant in business contexts, such as relating innovatively and creatively to a problem, organising, planning and independently performing a work process as well as collaborative competences, as group work is often included in this form of teaching. It may be a good idea to use problem-based and problem-oriented teaching early in the education, so that students get used to being active in their own learning process, participating and engaging inquisitively with the teaching rather than getting used to the fact that learning is something that occurs merely by the teacher delivering the academic material (Ulriksen, 2021, p. 362).

EXAMPLE

How lecturing can promote active learning

One way to promote active learning in connection with lectures is to encourage students to reflect on how the content is relevant to them. For example, this could involve reflecting on how they can apply the presented content, what particularly interested them in that day's reading, or how they plan to change their practice in the future based on the content presented. This reflection and break from the lecture can, in practice, be implemented through silent individual reflection for four minutes, during which students are encouraged to write down keywords, or through freewriting, where students continuously write down their stream of thoughts on the topic for five minutes. The reflection can also take place in dialogue with the person sitting next to you, either based on a question or a small assignment asked by the teacher (Ravn, 2023).

Lectures can also inspire and involve active learning

The principle of active learning does not mean that lectures must be removed from the course programme. Lectures can be a source of inspiration for the students and an important resource for them to be presented with complicated academic material (Ulriksen, 2021, p. 270). But in a lecture where the teacher covers a densely packed programme with a lot of content, much of the information will not be retained by the students (Felder & Brent, 2016, pp. 117-118). In order for students to gain a better understanding of the content presented during the lecture, it is important that they have the opportunity to work with it themselves shortly afterwards or in connection with the lecture. In addition, the ability to stay attentive is much lower during teaching in which students primarily listen to others conveying information. Therefore, it is important to break up the lecture regularly, about every 15 to 20 minutes, with a break or other activity that actively involves the students (Felder & Brent, 2016, pp. 117-119; Ulriksen, 2021, pp. 300-301).

Group work can promote active learning

One form of teaching that particularly promotes active learning is group work. Collaboration and group work have great potential to promote motivation, self-efficacy and active, in-depth learning in the student (Allan, 2016, p. 81; Chang & Brickman, 2018, p. 17; Fredricks et al., 2004; Pintrich, 2003; Zepke & Leach, 2010). But especially long-term group work and collaboration can be both professionally and socially challenging (Rienecker et al., 2015, pp. 190-191). Therefore, it is important not to see group work as an easy and self-running solution for engaging students. On the contrary, effective group work requires the teacher to prepare the teaching thoroughly and to guide students in establishing productive collaboration and managing conflicts (cf. Rienecker et al., 2015, p. 190). Dysfunctional collaborations can risk creating personal conflicts between the students in the group, weaken the self-efficacy and engagement of one or more group members and in some cases lead to dissatisfaction and drop-out (Allan, 2016; Krogh & Jensen, 2020; Rienecker et al., 2015). Conversely, it is not a criterion for success that all group work must take place smoothly and without disagreement. Some types of conflict may strengthen the students' learning process, such as fruitful academic conflicts about the academic work. However, the moment disagreements develop into personal conflicts, action should be taken (Allan, 2016; Rienecker et al., 2015).

EXAMPLE

How the teacher can facilitate better group work

Good collaboration is central to a well-functioning study group and is supported by the fact that the framework and purpose of the group work is well thought out, explicit and continuously facilitated by the teacher. For example, the students may benefit from being presented with collaboration and communication strategies prior to the group work, such as the establishment of group contracts and ongoing division of roles (Rask et al., 2021).

EXAMPLE

How to compose the groups

In broad terms, group composition can either be determined by the teacher or the programme administration or by allowing the students to choose their own groups (Malmquist et al., 1963 in Rienecker et al., 2015, p. 192). In terms of the latter, student popularity and friendly relationships often play a role in group formation. This can contribute to the exclusion of certain students within the class, and it may be counterproductive to allow students with similar levels of agreement and the same academic ability to form groups based on the rationale that group work maximises learning outcomes through discussion from different perspectives (Ravn, 2023, pp. 149-150; Rienecker et al., 2015, p. 193). Conversely, it may be argued that allowing students to control group formation can ensure higher motivation and engagement within the group (Allan, 2016). These considerations can be taken into account when considering which approaches you choose as a teacher.

EXAMPLE

How to distribute the roles in the group

Group members tend to fall into fixed roles such as "the leader" or "the scapegoat" or take on the same tasks as "the one who gets the ideas" or "the one who writes" (Rienecker et al., 2015, p. 197). One way to address this is by using rotating roles during group work. This may promote student engagement, productive interaction and create a more level playing field for student participation in group work (Chang & Brickman, 2018, p. 13). Group members can take turns taking on the role of moderator, notetaker or "group leader" responsible for the overall progress and coordination of the project or assignment. It is important that the group discusses exactly what the function and responsibilities of the roles should entail (Rienecker et al., 2015, pp. 196-197). Rotating roles create a framework that allows everyone to have a greater opportunity to contribute. In this way, it can support the development of competences, foster a more reflective understanding of aspects of collaboration and challenge students to engage with tasks and roles beyond those they would normally choose.



Attention points for working with forms of active learning

This second principle emphasises the importance of teaching that activates the students, and that group work and student activities can be effectively structured and closely monitored by the teacher.

- 1 Create a clear framework for active participation – and share responsibility for the learning process with the students by, for example, stating the purpose of active forms of learning so that the students understand why they should participate and what they gain from it.
- 2 Incorporate short, engaging activities into lectures to promote understanding, for example by breaking up the lecture every 15-20 minutes with brief exercises, reflection questions or dialogue, in which the students work actively with the content. Use these activities to gain insight into the students' understanding of the material so that the teaching can be adjusted to their needs.
- 3 Plan, structure and be available in the group work. Prepare students for collaborative processes and give them specific tools to handle academic disagreements constructively. Support the planning of assignments and roles that structure the group work, so that, for example, it is determined in advance who is the note-taker, who presents and who asks critical questions about the product. This gives the students the opportunity to concentrate on the academic aspects.

THIRD PRINCIPLE

Good teaching gives the students a sense of mastery



Students' self-efficacy, engagement and motivation can be supported by teaching that gives students the opportunity to master the academic material (Bandura, 1977). A sense of mastery helps give students a sense of control over their own learning process. The experience of control over one's own learning process promotes learning for understanding (Pintrich, 2003). Therefore, it is a good idea to consider how the teaching environment can support more students in gaining a sense of mastery early in the programme to create a positive spiral where self-efficacy and motivation and engagement go hand in hand.

An appropriate academic level can support a sense of mastery

A sense of mastery does not necessarily lead to learning if the task facing the student is too easy. Rather, mastery is about giving students the opportunity to work with difficult content in a way where they successfully master the challenge along the way (Ulriksen, 2021, p. 46). The level of difficulty of assignments and the expectations the teacher sets for the students must therefore be adapted to the students' level so that they are challenged to a sufficient degree (Pintrich, 2003). Otherwise, there is a risk that some students lose motivation and engagement in relation to teaching, that their academic progression stagnates, or that their opportunity for in-depth learning is lost.

Too fast-paced teaching can hinder the students' sense of mastery

On the other hand, too fast a pace in teaching can hinder the students' sense of mastering the academic material. It takes time and immersion to overcome academic challenges. If the student constantly feels behind in relation to the academic material due to content overload and a high pace in teaching, this may create a vicious cycle of reduced academic self-confidence and diminished engagement and motivation in the programme (Ulriksen, 2021). The pace of the teaching also has an impact on the students' access to learning (Case & Gunstone, 2003; Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023). If students perceive the teaching as rushed and find it difficult to keep up, they are more likely to adopt a superficial or strategic approach to learning, where the objective of learning is to pass the exam rather than form a deeper understanding of the content. Or the students may have to find "gaps" in the education system, for example by skipping an exam to create time for immersion (Nielsen & Ulriksen, 2023).

” He remembered being a student himself [...] I usually use the expression: “I like teachers who think we are stupid, because then they start at a level where everyone can participate.” He also got to know us personally. He is not working against AI, he is making us use it instead. It is also appreciated that we are not simply being lectured.

STUDENTS ABOUT A TEACHER WHO MEETS THEM AT AN ACADEMIC LEVEL

EXAMPLE

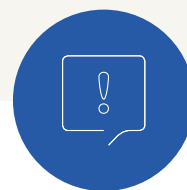
How problem-oriented teaching can support students' sense of mastery

In the context of problem-based or problem-oriented teaching, the teacher can adjust the *degree of openness* to support a sense of mastery in the students.

The degree of openness refers to the extent to which the problem or procedures are given in advance by the teacher, e.g. that group work is a requirement and that there is only one or a limited set of correct answers (Ulriksen, 2021, pp. 347-349). The teacher may create a more or less open approach by defining the problem

in advance and having an idea of what the answer should be, but leaving it up to the students what approaches they use to arrive at the answer.

In all courses, work on academic problems must be adapted to the students' level of competence, so that it supports a sense of mastery. In science courses and some language courses, the solution or investigation of a problem may require students to master some complex methods and competences that they cannot fully acquire within the course period (Ulriksen, 2021, p. 356). In this case, an idea might be for students to simply *discuss* the necessary methodological steps (Felder & Brent, 2016, p. 121).



Points of attention when working with teaching that creates a sense of mastery

This third principle emphasizes the importance of students gaining a sense of mastery in order to take ownership of their own learning process and to promote understanding of the academic material.

- 1 Plan the teaching so that the students early in the process have the opportunity to succeed with relevant, but not too complex academic assignments. Clearly articulate what they have mastered: "Here you show that you can ..." – so that they connect specific experiences with a sense of academic competence.
- 2 Adjust the level of difficulty and expectations so that both align with the students' varying abilities. As many students as possible should be challenged at an appropriate level – including a level high enough to maintain their motivation.
- 3 Slow down the pace where understanding requires immersion, and deliberately plan more time, practice and repetition in areas of the course where the students typically lose their overview. Create space for immersion during teaching: pauses for reflection, brief writing exercises, peer discussions or short summary assignments before moving on.

TEACHER:

I see the course through the students' eyes

It is of no use to assume that those who do not learn anything from a lecture should just go home. No teaching method or activity works for everyone, so variation is the best way to reach a broad range of students, says Martin Kongsbak-Wismann, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Copenhagen.

What is your guide as a teacher?

” My teaching is focused on a student-centred approach. I constantly remind myself that the students in a year group and in a lecture hall are very diverse – and even more diverse than we were when I started my own education. I can clearly see that we have a highly diverse group of students with different backgrounds and needs. Therefore, I also strive to nuance my own ideas about the best way to learn.

What are you doing specifically to motivate your students?

” I always try to view the course from the students' perspective. What do they need to understand, and how do they need to be presented with this complex knowledge? It is of no use to assume that those who do not learn anything from a lecture should just go home. No teaching method or activity works for all students, so variation in teaching and formats is the best way to reach a broad range of learners – both within a single class and across a course. I estimate that when I teach broadly and inclusively, I reach around 95 % of the students. The remaining 5 %, those who are exceptionally capable, I may not impact significantly. However, I can reach them when individual assignments and projects are to be completed.



” I am personally passionate about immunology and consider it the most interesting and far-reaching health topic. I want to share that enthusiasm!

MARTIN KONGSBK-WISMANN

How do you vary your teaching?

” I actually use a variety of formats. First, I livestream all lectures and class sessions and make them available online for later use. This allows students to decide whether they want to attend in person or participate from home, and it also gives everyone the opportunity to revisit classes later in the course or before exams. In addition, I co-host the podcast "Kroppens Bodguards" about the body with a fellow teacher. The podcast is a pedagogical tool that explains extremely complex processes in simple terms. At the same time, we have used AI to generate a large number of multiple choice questions aimed at the exam, which students can use to test themselves online. It is important to note, however, that my objective is not for each student to use all of these resources, but that a broad range of options provides an appropriate learning offer for everyone.

Do you have a special hack that always works?

” I have found that it works well to let the students use the last half hour of the class to test their knowledge of the week's content. In collaboration with the person sitting next to them, they answer a series of questions related to the teaching using their smartphones. I receive the responses immediately, which gives me a fairly precise idea of whether the students, broadly speaking, have understood the topic or if I need to review it again – without holding the students accountable. At the same time, I receive direct feedback on my teaching: If several students have not understood the material, I must approach it differently the next time.

Sounds like you spend a lot of time preparing?

” Yes, I do. And the students can feel it. Just as they can feel that I am passionate about the course. If you gave all my material with podcasts and multiple choice questions to another teacher, the teaching would not necessarily motivate the students in the same way. I know, because I've tried!

Why do you choose to prioritise teaching?

” Because it is meaningful – especially considering that we are educating doctors in immunology. They really need to understand the significance of the body's responses to diseases in order to practice medicine as effectively as possible – for all our sakes. I am personally passionate about immunology and consider it the most interesting and far-reaching health topic. I want to share that enthusiasm!

What is the reaction from the students?

” I can see that significantly more students than those I am scheduled to teach are present in the lecture hall and follow my lectures online. I can also see that the recorded versions of lectures I upload for streaming are watched by many – again, more than just those I am directly responsible for teaching. Furthermore, I have several times experienced a student coming to me and saying: "I do not actually find immunology interesting, but when you teach it, I always want to learn more anyway". In such moments, my mission as a teacher is accomplished.



WE ASKED:

Martin Kongsbak-Wismann, Associate Professor and PhD at the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of Copenhagen. In 2025, along with a co-teacher, was nominated for the Novo Nordisk Foundation award as Teacher of the Year in Health Sciences and nominated for the University of Copenhagen's Teaching Award "Harald of the Year".

FOURTH PRINCIPLE

Good teaching includes formative feedback



To promote the learning process, feedback to the students should be formative and forward-looking. Meaningful feedback should focus on the development of competences rather than on the student's final learning outcome (Pintrich, 2003, p. 673). Formative feedback must enable the student to independently work with their own learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, pp. 2-3) and enable the students to assess the quality of their work themselves (Tai et al., 2018). The students must also learn to work more reflectively with their own academic development, motivate themselves (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Tomlinson, 2014) and, not least, focus on learning rather than assessment (Thomas, 2021, p. 235). Formative feedback can also serve to clarify unarticulated expectations and unwritten rules for the student (Thomas, 2021, p. 235). It is therefore also important that the feedback does not only focus on what the students have done wrong, as it may weaken the students' academic confidence (Ulriksen, 2021, p. 41).

Formative feedback is in contrast to summative feedback, which is feedback that is given about the end result and not about how the learning process is progressing or can proceed going forward (Wedel, 2018, pp. 197-198).

Formative feedback can come from both the teacher and fellow students

Feedback can take many forms. It can be provided by the teacher to students or from students to other students. However, it can also be self-directed. This may occur when a student actively, for example, compares an assignment formulation with a draft of their own work, or it may happen incidentally, such as when a student overhears a conversation among fellow students about an assignment, prompting them to reconsider their own work (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Jensen et al., 2023).

Meaningful feedback should focus on the development of competencies rather than on the student's final learning outcome.



Points of attention for good feedback practice

David Nicol and Debra Macfarlane-Dick (2007) describe seven principles of effective feedback practice that enable students to take responsibility for their own learning and engage actively with their performance, rather than being passive recipients of corrections.

- 1 Clarify for students what constitutes good performance.
- 2 Facilitate student involvement in evaluating performance, for example through peer feedback.
- 3 Provide high-quality comments on student performance. The amount of feedback should be limited, precise and focused on the performance rather than the student. Feedback should be delivered in time for students to act on it, for example in the event of resubmission.
- 4 Create opportunities for dialogue among students and with the instructor about learning, for example by having students discuss received feedback in groups or ask questions about feedback in plenary sessions, potentially anonymously.
- 5 Motivate students and strengthen their self-confidence, for example by commenting only on specific aspects of performance rather than on the student personally.
- 6 Provide students with opportunities to improve their performance, for example by allowing resubmissions, highlighting specific action points in the feedback or letting students work in groups to identify action points based on received feedback.
- 7 Provide the teacher with information that helps organise teaching. This can be achieved through small tests to gauge the students' level and identify challenging points or by having students indicate what they want feedback on or find difficult.

SOURCE: NICOL & MACFARLANE-DICK (2007)

FIFTH PRINCIPLE

Good teaching includes all students



Students in university programmes come from diverse backgrounds and possess different personal characteristics, which influence their readiness for learning and participation (Tomlinson, 2014).

Social background – such as ethnicity and parental level of education – can affect the students' ability to discern the academic expectations placed upon them in their studies (EVA, 2021; Hansen, 2014; Larsen, 2013; Ulriksen et al., 2010). Students' varying *academic backgrounds*, such as grade averages, subject-specific competences and study strategies, can also affect their ability to understand the academic material and keep pace with the teaching. Research shows a strong correlation between students' high school grade averages and their risk of drop-out (EVA, 2018a). If the students' academic interests and backgrounds are not addressed, this can negatively impact their motivation, academic self-confidence and academic engagement (Ulriksen et al., 2010). The students' different *academic interests* have an impact on what and how they are motivated during their studies (Pintrich, 2003; Ulriksen, 2002).

For example, students who choose their programme based on academic interest have a lower risk of dropping out during their first year compared with students who do not base their choice on academic interest (EVA, 2019).

Teaching can meet and challenge student expectations

At the beginning of a programme, students often approach their studies with a range of expectations – including expectations related to their academic identity, which they will develop and adjust over the course of their education. For example, an engineering student may choose the programme due to an interest in the management aspects of the field, but later discover that a more appropriate focus at the bachelor's level is the acquisition of fundamental engineering skills (Holmegaard et al., 2014). Rather than undermining the student's academic identification, this may prompt reflection and encourage the student to redefine their role and identity in ways that are meaningful in relation to the programme expectations. Teaching can support this process of finding new meaning in the programme.

Teaching can promote the experience of belonging

Teaching that promotes belonging frees up mental energy to focus on academic aspects (Steele, 1997; Healey & Stroman, 2020, p. 4). Teaching promotes belonging when

” He was very animated and highly enthusiastic. It immediately drew me in. I looked forward to his lectures. He made the course much more exciting. He went up to the board, wrote “DNA” in large letters, and said it was the most important thing in the world. He provided a clear overview. The continuity across the lectures created a picture that we expanded upon each time.

STUDENTS ABOUT A TEACHER WHO CREATES ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND COHERENCE IN TEACHING

students experience academic identification, i.e. they can identify with the academic aspect of the study and experience it as relevant to their personal development (Reimer & Andersen, 2022; Tinto, 2015, p. 9).

The academic content of the programme, the competences trained, the potential professional identity and future career must be in line with the students' self-image, interests and expectations for the programme (Holmegaard et al., 2014).

Vulnerable students may need special support

Students with disabilities such as dyslexia or psychosocial challenges may, to a greater extent than other students, have difficulty understanding and adapting to the pace of study and the study strategies expected of them in the programme (Larsen et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2023; Wulf-Andersen, 2023). When students are helped to understand the academic expectations and keep up with the teaching, it helps strengthen their academic confidence, engagement and motivation. Research also points to a new form of vulnerability (Katznelson et al., 2021), where problems with dissatisfaction among a broader group of students can have a negative impact on their overall well-being and on how they perform while studying. For example, it can be seen that negative study-related feelings are linked to poor general well-being, a higher risk of drop-out and poorer academic performance (EVA, 2026).

Flexible and varied teaching motivates broadly

When students come with different backgrounds, professional interests and competences, their motivation and academic engagement in the courses also differ (Pintrich, 2003; Ulriksen, 2002; Wulf-Andersen, 2023).

This means that the students may need differentiated teaching (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 22). Students will, for example, be more motivated to engage in the academic material if they can work with something in the courses that they consider meaningful in relation to their academic interests, expectations for the programme and academic competence development, and if they find the academic material useful (Pintrich, 2003). There are several approaches to differentiated teaching that are inclusive of several students.

“ I like the relationship with the course teacher and my lecturer. Even though they are higher up in the hierarchy, I like to talk more casual. But some just come and teach and go again. They are not responsible for our engagement, but when they do not seem engaged to us, then I do not want to engage in their teaching.

STUDENTS ABOUT ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHING

An important step is to create teaching that the students can relate to. A diversified curriculum will support that more students can relate to it across gender, age, social and cultural background, etc. It can either be done by the teacher finding topics and alternative sources that are varied and diverse, or by students themselves being invited to contribute content and sources they find relevant (Thomas, 2021, p. 227). It may relate to the authors in the curriculum, but it may also relate to the wording of essays, examples and assignments that may reflect a range of the course applications.

Knowledge of the students strengthens the opportunities to be diverse and inclusive

The students' different learning approaches and paces can, for example, be accommodated by the fact that there is room and flexibility in the plan for the individual class to let the students dwell more on something if needed, or an exciting and rewarding academic discussion is underway (Ravn, 2023, p. 178). A simple but effective approach is silent reflection, supporting that the students who are fastest to formulate a thought will not dominate the course (Ravn, 2023, pp. 115-116).



Attention points for working with activating learning

This fifth principle underlines the importance of the teacher including all students and, over time, providing the opportunity to participate and contribute in different ways.

- 1 Vary the teaching and the opportunity for participation by using varied forms of teaching, pace and types of assignments. For example, allow for group discussions, immersion and joint conversation. Feel free to use variation during the same class and also vary across classes and courses.
- 2 Work deliberately to incorporate the students' interests and expectations into teaching. Create space for students to find meaning in the course by linking activities and examples to their academic interests and expectations for the study, for example by making it clear why statistics are central to psychology or why an understanding of basic biology can strengthen a medical student's later profession.
- 3 Review the curriculum, cases and examples with a view to representation so that more students can relate to the content and possibly include the students' suggestions and wishes, so that the teaching also reflects the students' current interests and backgrounds for participation.
- 4 Adjust the teaching according to the students' participation and experience of pace. Prioritise short feedback exercises, conversations or reflection exercises that allow the teacher to gain a better understanding of the students' experience of the teaching level and pace. Be flexible and adjust to the situation when, for example, a valuable academic discussion arises or the students show special interest in a theme or text.



The 5 principles of good teaching – in brief

1.

Good teaching follows a common thread that is clear to both the teacher and the students. This means that all activities are based on a clear connection between academic content, learning objectives and assessment formats.

? Questions for reflection:

How can you strengthen your communication about the relevance of teaching so that the students understand why a course and an activity is relevant? In what ways can exams and learning objectives be used more actively as motivation in teaching?

2.

Good teaching includes active forms of learning where the students are engaged and have the opportunity to participate by investigating, discussing and solving problems to promote a deeper understanding of the subject.

? Questions for reflection:

What are some good examples of active learning that you or your colleagues have used? What worked? How can active learning play a greater role in your teaching?

3.

Good teaching gives all students opportunities to master. Already early in the process, students can be supported in gaining a sense of mastery, including by ensuring an appropriate academic level and a pace that allows room to immerse themselves and overcome academic challenges.

? Questions for reflection:

What are some good examples of creating a sense of mastery among your students? What worked? How can teaching focus more on creating a sense of mastery?

4.

Good teaching contains formative feedback that gives students specific opportunities to adjust and improve their learning along the way.

? Questions for reflection:

Consider how you can use feedback more appropriately in your teaching? Are there new approaches you could adopt? Are you getting enough feedback from your students in regards to classes or assignment formulations?

5.

Good teaching is inclusive and varied, so different students' backgrounds, interests, expectations and academic contributions are recognised and supported. This requires working with different formats, learning styles and perspectives in the individual course.

? Questions for reflection:

Consider how you can learn more about the students' interests and competences and use that knowledge actively in teaching. How do you acquire sufficient knowledge about how they learn best and how they prefer to communicate?

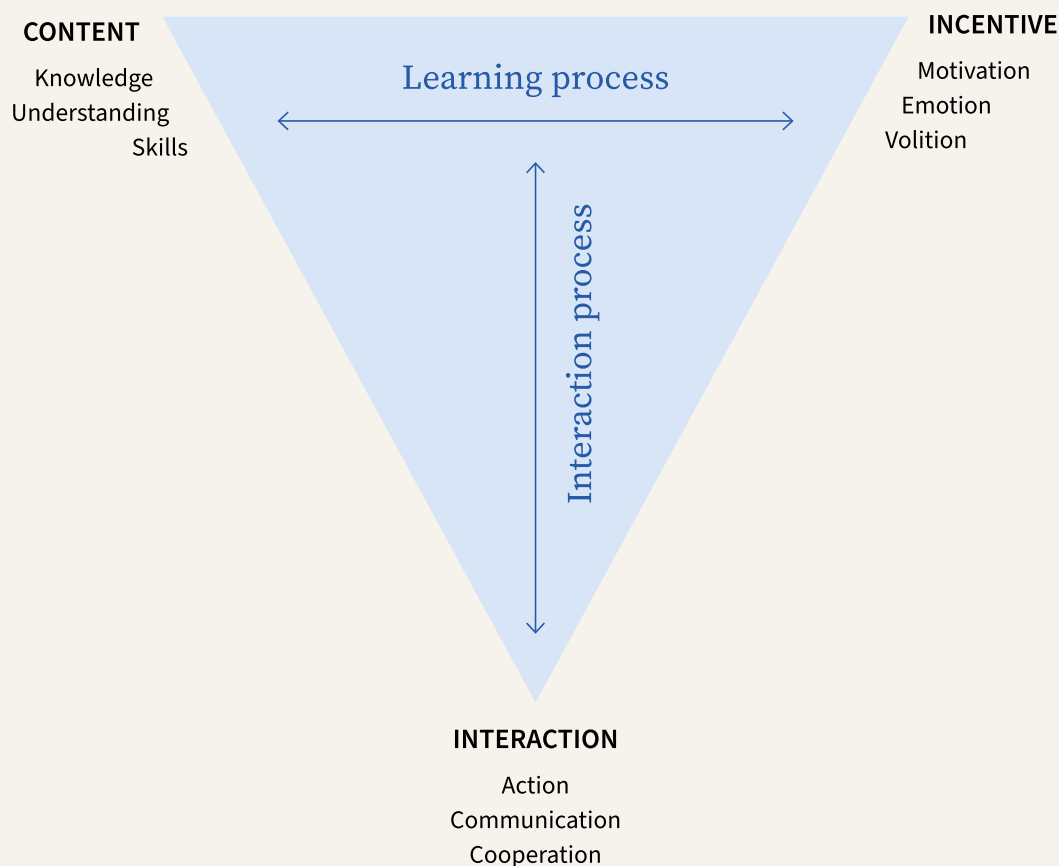
Overall, this approach creates teaching that is both academically rigorous, engaging and supportive and that promotes learning, participation and reflection in all students.

What research says about the student's learning process

Existing research literature indicates that a general premise for good teaching at universities is that teaching must focus on the students' learning process. The perspective can be seen as a reaction to the fact that teachers and universities have traditionally had a too narrow focus on content and the delivery of teaching (Ulriksen, 2021, p. 46). Put simply, teaching at universities has been characterised as a process, where the teacher sees their task as transferring knowledge within the course to the students, who are then individually responsible for absorbing and applying this knowledge (Åkerlind, 2004).

In this chapter, we therefore present several theoretical insights from recent research literature on what is at stake in the student learning process. Knowledge of the student learning process provides insight into what effective teaching should engage with and support.

FIGURE 2 — Illeris' learning triangle (Illeris 2015)



The student must learn to understand

Learning to understand is learning in a way that strengthens the students' ability to explain, exemplify, generalise, analogise, critically evaluate and present knowledge and put it into perspective in new ways (EVA, 2018b, p. 18).

"Learning for understanding" is seen in contrast to learning which aims to ensure that the student can simply reproduce the content of the teaching, e.g. for exams (Fry et al., 2003, p. 18). Learning for understanding is when the academic content is assessed critically, understood and put into play in a larger context – also outside the teaching and exam situation (Entwistle, 2009).

Research indicates that teaching can promote *learning for understanding* (Entwistle, 2009; Gardner, 2001; Ulriksen, 2021). That is, good teaching plays a crucial role in promoting in-depth learning, where students become active participants who not only learn by remembering, but also reflect on concepts, relations and systematics. The goal is for students to be able to explain, critically evaluate and apply knowledge in new ways.

Learning for understanding requires incentive, content and interaction

Learning for understanding arises in the interaction between the student's *incentive*, the *academic content* of the teaching and the student's *interaction* with the teacher and the other students (Ulriksen, 2021, pp. 26-29). The three cornerstones of the learning process are described in researcher Knud Illeris' (2015) learning model, known as Illeris' learning triangle, which has had a major impact on Danish educational theory and practice.

CONTENT must be understood broadly as the academic material that the teaching aims to convey to the students and covers, in addition to knowledge, also skills, understanding, insight and competences.

INCENTIVE deals with the student's ability to mobilise mental energy to learn. The incentive has an impact on the individual student's motivation and learning and thus also what the individual student gets out of the learning. Students' past experiences and emotional impulses such

as desire, joy, boredom or feeling of inadequacy in relation to the teaching content and the learning situation are of great importance for the student's motivation to learn. Here it is a crucial principle that students' different approaches and prerequisites for learning are considered (Svendby, 2023; Thomas, 2021; Tomlinson, 2014). This has only become even more relevant with the increased diversity of the student population at universities in recent decades.

INTERACTION is essential for the student to mobilise motivation and engage in academic work. Learning takes place in a mutual influence between the individual student and their environment. The student's learning process does not take place in isolation, but in interaction with the teacher and other students as well as the institutional learning environment, including the specific programme's organisational and physical environment as well as broader societal and cultural environment (Illeris, 2015, pp. 42-43). The interaction in relation to the student's learning will take place in a number of different learning spaces, for example when the student reads and solves assignments alone or in groups, and not least in classes in interaction with the teacher and the other students.

High self-efficacy, academic engagement and motivation promote learning for understanding

Illeris' learning triangle shows the importance of the student's incentive in the learning process. We also know from research that students are more likely to achieve learning for understanding if they have *high self-efficacy, student engagement and motivation* (Baeten et al., 2010; Mann, 2001; Pintrich, 2003; Rienecker et al., 2015; Ulriksen, 2021). Empirically speaking, the three concepts are closely related and affect each other. In research literature, they are treated as three different analytical concepts, all of which are linked to the learning process.

SELF-EFFICACY is an English term that does not have a direct translation into Danish, but can be translated as "academic confidence" or "mastery expectations". The term describes individuals' assessment of whether they are able to perform the necessary actions to achieve a specific goal (Bandura, 1977). When students experience higher self-efficacy, i.e. when they feel they have good opportunities to master what they are learning, they are also more likely to be motivated to work harder to overcome any challenges in mastering academic activities and understanding the material (Zimmerman, 1995). Conversely, students with low self-efficacy will be more likely to give up on an assignment or try to avoid assignments that challenge their competences.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT covers student involvement in the social as well as professional aspects of the programme (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Fredricks et al., 2004; Kahu, 2013; Pintrich, 2003; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Based on this literature, EVA has in connection with a previous study developed the concept of academic engagement to limit the focus to the part of student engagement that is academically motivated (EVA, 2020b, 2020c). *Academic engagement* is expressed in the students' interest and experience of the usefulness of the academic content, learning strategies and efforts to learn in depth (Fredricks et al., 2004, p. 64).

MOTIVATION refers to what makes people act and strive for certain goals (Pintrich, 2003). Motivation is important for giving direction to learning and for the willingness and energy the students put into understanding the academic material (Ulriksen, 2021, p. 24).

SELF-EFFICACY, STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION play a role in the student's *incentive* in the learning process and are, among other things, conditioned by personal interests and values that have been developed over a longer period of time. At the same time, the student's experience of self-efficacy, academic engagement and motivation can also be influenced by the *content* of the

The student's learning process does not take place in isolation, but in interaction with the teacher and other students as well as the institutional learning environment, including the specific programme's organisational and physical environment.

When requirements and support are balanced, the students experience a better opportunity to master the challenges and gradually develop competences that match the expectations of the programme and the academic requirements.

teaching and by the student's *interaction* with the teacher and the other students. The structural framework of the programme and, in particular, the teaching is also important. Good teaching is therefore essential for the student to continue to experience and develop self-efficacy, student engagement and motivation throughout the study period.

Didactic choices can strengthen the students' self-efficacy, engagement and motivation

When planning teaching, it can be beneficial to consider how to support the students' self-efficacy, engagement and motivation.

The teaching can support the students' self-efficacy when they have an early opportunity to experience that they master the academic requirements, i.e. by organising assignments and learning activities with clear progression and appropriate differentiation. When requirements and support are balanced, the students experience a better opportunity to master the challenges and gradually develop competences that match the expectations of the programme and the academic requirements (Holmegaard et al., 2014).

The teaching can also contribute to a strengthened engagement among the students when it presents the course identity in ways that open up different perspectives and interests. Academic or professional identities in the programme may be both including and excluding (Hasse, 2002; Healey & Stroman, 2020; Steele, 1997), but through the inclusion of varied examples, cases and applications, the teaching can strengthen the experience of professional relevance and engagement. For example, it may be relevant to think about how, through course literature, guest lecturers or cases, students can be presented with ways of practicing the subject that are not closely related to university research.

Since the study environment is shaped by narratives about who belongs (see also the brief "Social study environments at the university", EVA 2026), teaching can influence how stereotypical notions are continued or challenged. For example, narratives about men being better at math than women can affect female math students' opportunities to experience motivation and belonging (Steele, 1997, pp. 613-614). Conversely, when the teacher actively addresses and nuances such notions, the opportunity for all students to engage in the subject is strengthened. Finally, teaching can promote student engagement to the extent that clear connections are created between the expectations students bring to their studies and the academic content by, for example, introducing students to core academic content already in the first semester.



The student's learning process – in brief:

- Good teaching is teaching that promotes the student's learning process with a focus on learning for understanding.
- Students are more likely to achieve learning for understanding if they have high self-efficacy, engagement and motivation.
- The student's learning process takes place between three vertices of the learning triangle: the student's incentive as academic engagement, motivation and self-efficacy, the academic content of the teaching and the interaction between the student and the teacher.

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