

Measuring teaching qualities

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Teachers and teaching are critical for students learning - thus to provide high quality teaching and education is the cornerstone for economic growth around the world. However – measuring teaching qualities have proven difficult and the field has been suffering from fragmentation; theoretical/methodological wars; and the lack of common instruments.

Recent developments in technology and research methodologies, in combination with an increased growth in empirical studies of classroom learning provide, however, new opportunities. Especially recent developments in video design and methodologies (nested research design), together with the developments of common coding manuals as measures of teaching qualities represent a huge step forward, I will argue in this presentation.

While observation manuals have been a part of the methodological toolkit for measuring qualities of instruction for decades, the field has also been suffering from “paradigm wars,” fragmentation and local production of instruments (Darling Hammond et al., 2010; Klette 2009). There is an urgent need for standardization, harmonization and integration of measures. If the field of “measuring teaching qualities” is to move forward we have to develop programmatic research that address a set of questions over time, including observation protocols for teaching that are both generic and subject specific. Such common tools for research developed within an integrated methodological design could help researchers making progress in aggregating knowledge about the impact of different teaching approaches across settings and subjects.

In my presentation I will summarize existing observation protocols in order to discuss how they can serve as approximates and measures for teaching quality, using analyses from Nordic and US classroom as empirical illustrations. For such an effort I will start out by looking at different approaches for measuring teaching quality, arguing that if we really want to understand qualities of teaching, instruction itself - that is the activities and interactions that take place between the teachers and their students - must be at the core of investigation. Video design has proven especially valuable for such an ambition scholars agree (Hiebert et al., 2003; Clarke et al, 2006; Janik & Seidel, 2009; Klette 2009). Video can reveal practices more clearly, facilitate discovery of new alternatives, stimulate to discussion about suitable coding categories and choices within each instructional practice and context, and thus deepen educators’ understanding of teaching. Video data further facilitates secondary analysis and increases inter-rater reliability and enhance training facilities.

Parallel with the growth in video design and nested research design, scholars also seem to agree on the following elements as critical for high quality instruction: instructional clarity, cognitive challenge (activation), the quality of teacher-student interaction, and supportive climate. In the presentation, I focus on a variety of issues related to measuring classroom practice, looking across different observation protocols as the basis for this exploration. I analyze challenges linked to reliability and validity to raise broader questions about measuring teacher and teaching effectiveness. I will also discuss the use of observation protocols as a tool for developing ‘expertise in teaching’ and for targeted professional development.