Early stage fright

Vignette #13

Presentation

#13: Early stage fright

The following text sequence or vignette describes a situation in the context of a teaching that aims at research-based learning. The situation described challenges you as a teacher and may require you to act directly. The aim of the vignette is to allow you to think about what you are doing in such a situation or how you could prevent it. But you may also consider the situation to be problem-free and more conducive to learning. Either way you can preventively familiarize yourself with possible challenges and reflect upon your own evaluations and impulses for action.

The situations described are taken from interview data with coordinators of research-based learning projects and have been sharpened for the purpose mentioned above. The most common challenges in teaching courses to promote research-based learning have been selected and converted into vignettes.

Early stage fright

Third week of term. Full of anticipation, you entered the class to proudly announce a conference at the end of the course where students can present their project results. Until the very end, the conference had been on the brink of failure and had cost you a lot of nerves and persuasion. During the event, however, it quickly becomes clear that the students are not so enthusiastic about the offer. One student puts it in a nutshell: „And what if we don't have good results? What if we only embarrass ourselves?"

Keywords: Presentation, overstrain and uncertainty

Reflective questions

The situation described above is a typical challenge that you could face if you implement research-based learning in your teaching. The following questions of reflection serve as impulses to look at such or similar situations from different perspectives and then to come to different decisions:

Have you discussed with your students what „good results" in the research process are?

What should be achieved or learned from the presentation?

Do you feel that it is part of the process to be uncertain about your own results and do you think it is important for students to have this experience?

If you let the conference take place: Would you do it for your own sake or for that of the students? And if you were to cancel the conference?

Would you like the conference to present only the results in terms of content or also the learning process during the research process?

Attitudes and actions

In the following, attitudes as well as preventive and intervening actions in the situation described are presented. First of all, attitudes are described which have an impact on whether and how to react. Then actions are presented. They are practical examples of how teachers at universities deal with the situation in a preventive or intervening manner. In addition, indirect measures are listed which involve a more subtle approach yet may have a strong impact.

Attitudes

Attitudes do not include concrete measures but describe the inner attitude of teachers (or coordinators) towards different situations. Depending on the attitude, situations can be interpreted as „problematic" and „challenging", but also as „desirable" and „normal".

Make students bear their worries

You believe that failure is a part of the process. Failure is the greatest learning opportunity.

An appropriate action could be: You communicate your attitude to the students: It would also be okay if they do not achieve results worthy of presentation, because they can still learn a lot. In the concrete situation, however, you would make sure that failure is not perceived as a personal defeat, but rather that it is understood that failure is part of it, could have happened to others, and you would highlight the learning opportunities that have arisen as a result.

Preventive actions

Preventive actions prevent the situation described or rather makes them less likely. There is – of course – no guarantee of avoiding such conflicts.

Organise a dress rehearsal

Two days before the presentation, you will conduct a dress rehearsal, where all students will have an opportunity to practice their presentation. There will also be another opportunity for feedback.

Benefit of the action: This way the students have the certainty that they are not blindly running into an open knife, but that they are made aware of problems and embarrassments beforehand.

Intervening actions

Interventions are usually carried out „when the milk has already been spilled". These are therefore acute reactive measures:

Ensure results

Through close supervision, you ensure that all students can offer something presentable at the end of the course. It does not necessarily have to be what was originally intended – sometimes it can be enough to explain during the presentation why something did not work out.

Benefit of the action: The students certainly have something to present, even if it is not necessarily what they had hoped for. With good guidance, it can nevertheless become the presentable result of a knowledge process..

Options for the presentation

In the following, a number of suggestions are offered to reflect on the possibilities that still exist with regard to the presentation of results.

Audience settings of the presentation

- **closed (participants of the event)**
- **open for interested parties**
- **obligatory for external parties (e.g. following year)**
- **extensively advertised**
- **embedded in university culture**
- **at external conferences (e.g. student research conference)**

Types of presentation

- **conference**
- **poster presentation**
- **demonstration**
- **journal publication**

Time frame of the presentation

- **final meeting**
- **one-day event, e.g. annual conference**
- **conference week**
- **permanent display of posters**
- **journal publication**

Goals of the presentation

- **assessment of the own performance**
- **promoting intrinsic motivation**
- **taking responsibility for one's own performance**
- **noticing one's own progress**

Tipps and tricks

- **conduct a final rehearsal**
- **"re-polish" failed projects to the new presentable knowledge goal: why did it not work out?**