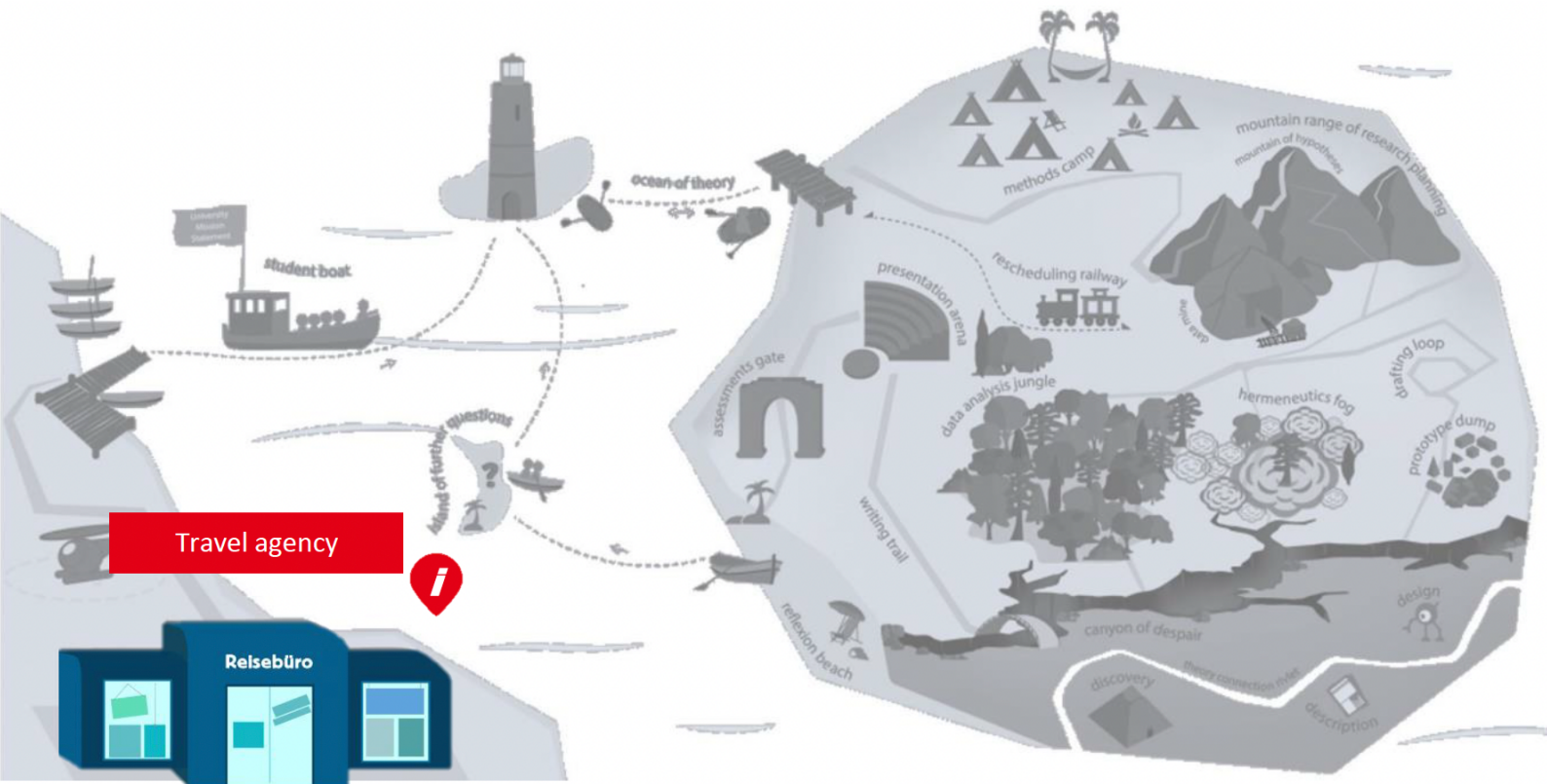




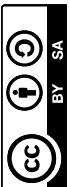
Scapegoating

Vignette #15



KEYWORDS:

TIME AND EFFORT



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GEFÖRDERT VOM

#15: Scapegoating



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.



Scapegoating

It's the middle of the term. You'll meet a colleague of yours in the hall. Relatively quickly he comes to the point: „Tell me, what are you doing in the BA3 seminar? Yesterday the students really got on my back when I wanted to give them a „bigger“ task. They would have no resources left at all and that I should turn to you if that bothers me,“ he says somewhat annoyed. „Phew“, you are surprised and annoyed at first – but you have to admit that the project eats up a lot of resources, even yours.

Keywords: Time and effort



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:

Are your requirements and therefore also the ECTS in your course appropriate?

How is your course interlocked with the other courses of the module/programme?

How do you see the role of your colleague in this situation – what responsibilities does he or she have?

How much less „contents“ in your course could you live with?

How does the amount of work in your event relate to other events in your department?



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“.

Encourage everyone to take responsibility

Research-based learning should not be a matter for individual teachers but should concern everyone at the institute.

An appropriate action could be/This could mean on the action level: You can work politically. Many universities have already included research-based learning as a teaching principle in their mission statements – you can work as a teacher to ensure that this does not remain merely a symbolic act. Especially so that the responsibility for this does not rest solely on your shoulders.

Highlight positive effects of research-based learning

You believe that by increasing the competence of your students, your colleagues can also benefit from the research-based learning on offer.

This could mean on the action level: You engage in a discussion with your colleague in which you take this position.

Critical self-reflection

As a teacher, you take the opportunity of feedback to question once again whether the students' criticism is justified. Do they possibly receive not enough credit points in relation to the workload of your course?

An appropriate action could be/This could mean on the action level: If you come to the conclusion that the ECTS assessment is unfair, you will have to explore options for action. Firstly, the future ECTS assessment can be changed. However, you might also have to consider how to deal with it in the current course – a joint exploration with the participants could be helpful.

Preventive actions

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

Create a broader anchoring

Your offer of research-based learning is anchored in the curriculum, for example by deciding on it as a fixed module.

Benefit of this action: It is generally known and anticipated that this module takes up a corresponding amount of resources among students. This is also reflected in the sample template for the module allocation for the course of studies in a way that there are not many parallel courses. Complaints about overworking do not then have to be accepted.

Adapt the timetable to rest of the course plan

Already in the conception you pay attention to the rest of the term plan, especially to exam phases. Setting milestones can be helpful in process control.

Benefit of this action: Neither teachers nor students are surprised that in certain study phases students suddenly have less time for the research project. This knowledge supports a more consistent awareness of the timetable on both sides.

Stretch over two terms

From experience you have learned that one term-time for a project of research-based learning is very short. Therefore, you have arranged for your course to extend over two terms. It is anchored in the curriculum accordingly and provided with an appropriate number of credit points.

Benefit of this action: There is relatively much time for the project. Therefore, there is more time to let the students find their own way.

Offer as an extracurricular activity

You offer research-based learning not in a curricularly integrated course, but in the form of an extracurricular activity.

Benefit of the action: The explicit extracurricular call for proposals would make it clear that it takes place in the students' leisure time – this also means that they would have no excuses with regard to their curricular obligations. Moreover, only particularly motivated students would participate.

Offer as a compulsory choice

In some universities or courses of study there is the possibility for students to choose minor subjects or elective courses. Students are given a certain number of credit points outside their own subject, which they can have credited to their study program. An offer of research-based learning could be located in this elective area.

Benefit of this action: The projects can be credited with an appropriate amount of ECTS points and can be included in the course of study by means of compulsory elective credits.

Enable term of learning space

As a means of profile development, some universities allow students a term with a flexible learning space. Students can enroll for this term and do not have to earn (additional) credit points during this time. If students receive BAföG, they must prove that they have 16 credit points per semester – this can also be achieved with a project of research-based learning if it is sufficiently extensive.

Benefit of this action: The offer of research-based learning would have no curricular competition; the students could concentrate entirely on the project – but would have to be prepared to invest an extra term for this.

Explain why such research-based learning opportunities are needed

In the discussion, you emphasise the relevance of research-based learning for increasing competence and the students' attitude towards studies and science.

Benefit of this action: You may win the approval of your college and pave the way for structural changes.

Fair credit point remuneration

Students will receive an appropriate amount of credit points for their workload on the project. Research-based learning often requires more work than is initially assumed, so it is better to plan generously.

Benefit of this action: The students cannot claim that they are too busy because the term planning is arranged differently so that there is not too much work done in one term.

Note: If it is not possible to award more credit points, make it clear at the beginning of the semester that the credit points cannot cover the workload.

