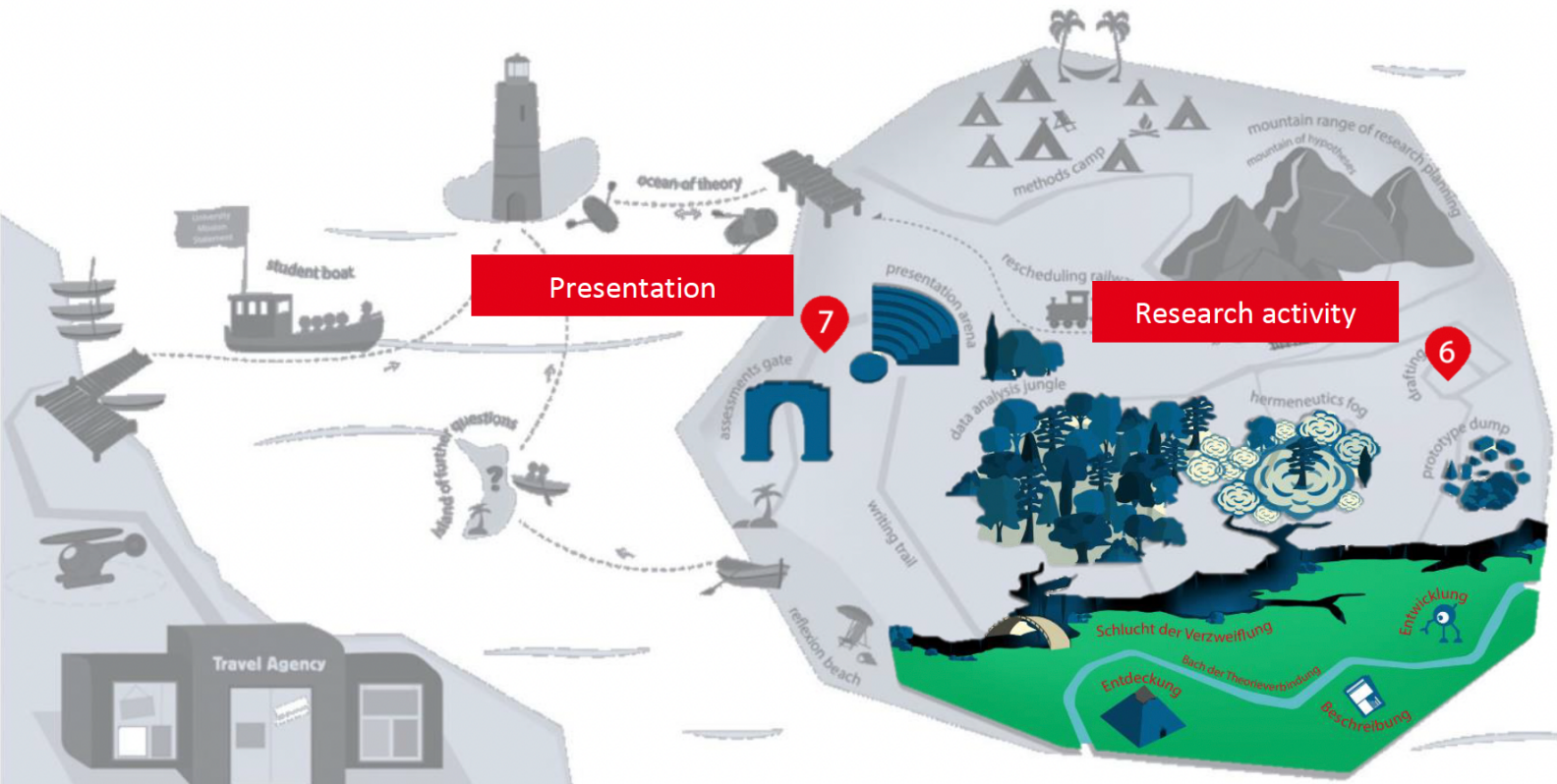




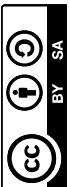
## Dead end

Vignette #8



### KEYWORDS:

HANDLING FAILURE



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GEFÖRDERT VOM

## #8: Dead end



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.



### Dead end

**You are in a project meeting. The longer you talk to the students, the more obvious it becomes: The students have already put a lot of energy into their concept, but as a group they have lost their way: the concept cannot and will not work that way. In addition, time is slowly running out to start all over again and to design a new project that will still produce results. You are now considering how best to proceed with the students.**

**Keywords: Handling failure**



### 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:

**How can you talk to students about their failure without discouraging them („failure as termination“)?**

**How could a compromise look like (e.g. realization of partial goals and components that would be feasible („failure as a lack of experience“))?**

**Do you see yourself as responsible for supporting students in coping with the consequences of failure?**

**What can students possibly learn from the experience of failure?**

**Think about your own learning experience: how did you react to failure during your studies?**



## 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“.

#### Consider failure as normal

**You consider failure to be part of the research. This happens to you, your colleagues and of course to the students – it is a normal part of science.**

This could mean on the action level: You talk openly with the students, preferably at eye level: this means standing up for your own failures and communicating that this is part of everyday life in science. Students recognize that this is a learning experience and feel encouraged to set new goals.

#### Consider and accept failure as a learning opportunity

**In your opinion, failure can help students gain valuable experience and get to know the reality of research. Therefore, you do not intervene to avoid hurdles or unplanned difficulties that the students (and you) often cannot foresee. But you make sure that students – despite all the frustration – see a learning outcome at the end of the process.**

This could mean on the action level: On the one hand, you honestly convey to the students that their project is not leading to the desired result. On the other hand, they make the point that mistakes are part of research and that they do not have to take failure personally. Together with the students and at eye level, you consider how things should now continue.

### Preventive action

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

## Provide opportunities for consultation with experts

**You provide your students with the opportunity to talk regularly with competent advisers about their state of research. This can help to ensure that risks of failure are identified and dealt with at an early stage.**

Benefit of this action: Through communication, risk factors for failure can be identified. In this way, some mistakes can be either avoided or corrected through certain tips. The exchange with someone other than the usual lecturer has a motivating effect and opens new perspectives for the students.

## Indirectly draw attention to problems in advance

**Even if you are already aware of potential problems, do not point them out to students during counselling sessions. Instead, you should ask questions in such a way that the students themselves recognise these challenges.**

Benefit of this action: Failure as serious as described in this situation could be avoided by early indirect intervention. However, this requires sufficiently close cooperation with the students so that you as a teacher can notice students getting astray in time. In addition, such a „Socratic discussion“ requires time and practice.

## Intervening actions

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

## Communicate to students that something has gone wrong

**You tell the students that the process is not conducive to achieving the objectives.**

Benefit of this action: It is very important that failure is addressed openly. A bad, unplanned or unexpected result is also a result. Students are confronted with the fact that research can go against expectations. In the first place, students should become aware that making mistakes is not unusual, but a learning opportunity. In a discussion, the students can reflect together on what went wrong and what they can do better in the future.