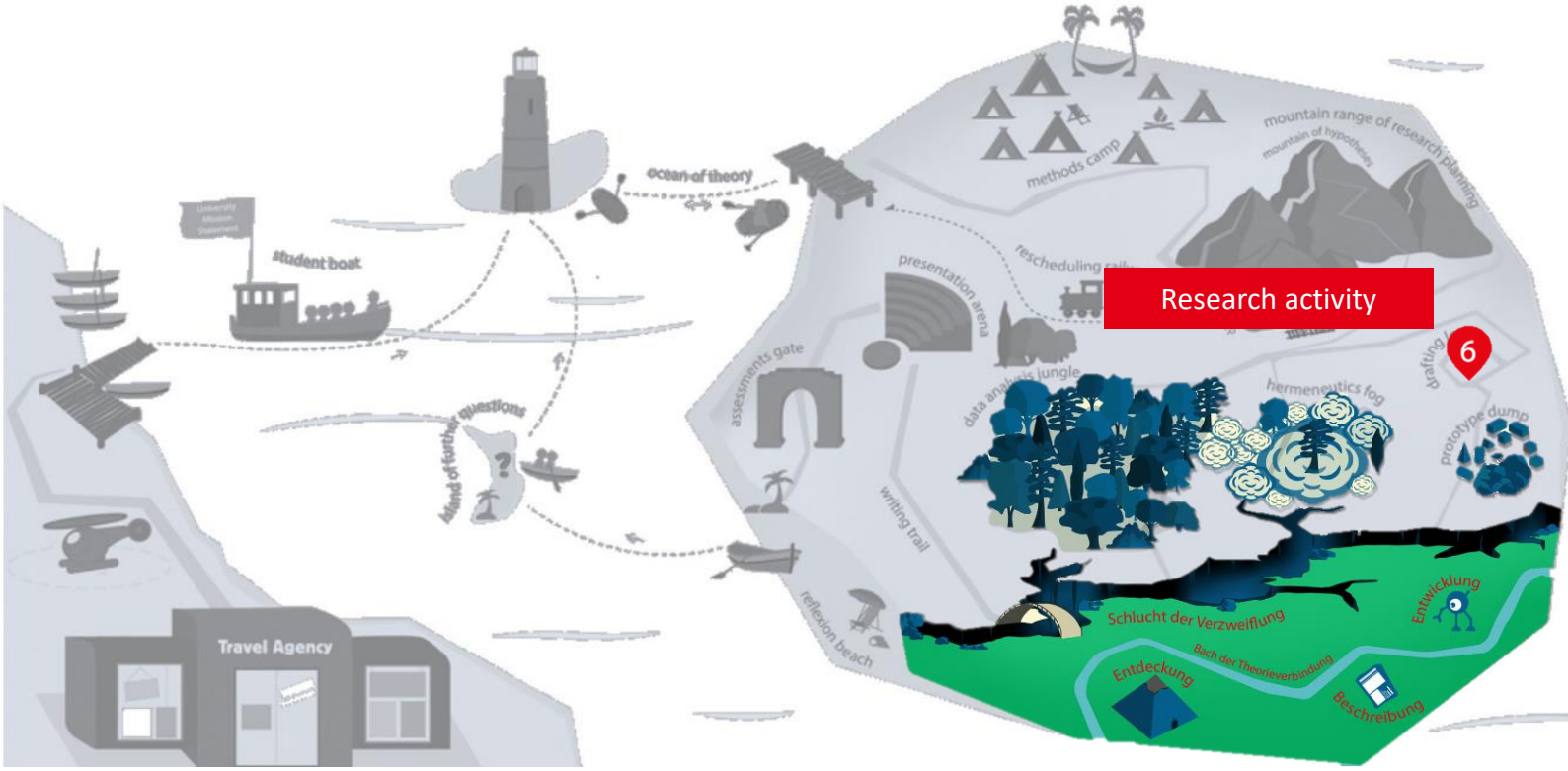
FideS
Forschungsorientierung in der Studieneingangsphase

Shooting stars and lame ducks

Vignette #7



KEYWORDS

STRUCTURE AND AUTONOMY, WORKLOAD, STUDENT MOTIVATION, QUESTIONS OF JUSTICE, DIFFERENCE AND HETEROGENEITY

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#7: Shooting stars and lame ducks

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.

Shooting stars and lame ducks

Mid-term. The course is half over and you notice that there are big differences in performance and motivation between your project groups. In addition to a thin midfield, there are two top-notch groups, whose motivation and research progress you are very impressed by. In addition, there are also two groups that do not really get going and one team that simply does the bare minimum. You are unsure how you want to handle this. On the one hand, the course is aimed precisely at personal responsibility and self-structuring. On the other hand, the groups do not realize how far apart they are, so you would have to act as a regulating element - if you wanted to do so at all.

Keywords: Structure and autonomy, workload, student motivation, questions of justice, difference and heterogeneity

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 made your standards for work results transparent in advance?

How satisfied or dissatisfied would you be with very heterogeneous results?

Which advantages and disadvantages speak for a clearer structure, which for a freer guidance?

Do you see yourself responsible for regulating the process?

If you would influence the process: Would you do it for your own sake or for that of the students?

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".

Let students design the processes on their own

You are convinced that students should take responsibility for their own project. You assume that teachers should only intervene in cases where group work is clearly getting out of hand. Consequently, you do not care about differences in performance during the process.

An appropriate action could be: You stand back and do not interfere with the process.

Preventive actions

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

Conduct team development before the start of the project

At the beginning of the project you organise an (external) team development programme for the participants. The students experience the positive effects of structuring the team through different roles - such as minute-taker, timekeeper, speaker, devil's advocate, etc.

Benefit of this action: The groups are instructed to structure themselves better and to work more goal-oriented.

Determine a contact person for the lecturer

At the beginning you ask for at least one contact person per group, with whom you regularly hold short, informal consultations.

Benefit of this action: This is a relatively informal way to communicate with groups in a low-threshold way and to easily check group goals and satisfaction. At the same time, you can also influence the process more effectively, or at least present options for action more easily.

Ask about the structuring needs of the groups

At the beginning of the course you can ask the students how much they would like to be supervised and how much structure they would like. Depending on this, you can then respond to their wishes.

Benefit of this action: From the beginning, students take responsibility for how much you as a teacher are involved in the process of the individual group. Consequently, you do not have to decide for yourself whether to readjust.ermine für die Kleingruppen anbieten:

Indirect (accompanying) actions

In addition, indirect measures are listed which involve a more subtle approach yet may have the same impact.

Deploy team facilitators

You can use tutors as team facilitators, for example. They observe the process and provide feedback on group behaviour and the research process at regular intervals. At the end of the course they could also write a summary of their observations for the students about students behaviour in the research and group process.

Benefit of this action: The team facilitators are providing feedback, thus differences or even deficits become explicit and the students can decide what to make of them.

Use project presentation as a feedback opportunity

At the end of the course, you make time for a session in which students present their results to each other.

On the one hand, students know from the very beginning that they are responsible for their own results and may therefore work with a little more commitment. On the other hand, they also see at the event what could have been achieved in the time available and thus receive feedback on their process through comparison with peers. In this case, the benchmark is not set by an authority figure like the teacher, but by the performance of the others.