

Course with case-based teaching and an innovation process to promote student engagement in research-based teaching

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Subject, course/other context, study level and number of students: "Current Themes and Issues in Ethnology - The cultural history of fashion in theory and practice", elective course at MA level (module 12; 15 ECTS), 13 students, offered under the Master's programme in Ethnology at the Saxo Institute at the Faculty of Humanities.

The motivation behind the activity: To introduce students to a classic ethnological area of research and to involve the students in my own current research project on the methodological issue of how knowledge about cultural heritage can be applied in the current debate about fashion and sustainability.

Key learning outcomes, focusing on the way in which the activity is research-based: The students learn how to work strategically with, and be curious about, the knowledge acquisition process. By sparring with a researcher (their teacher), the students learn to reflect critically on existing research and, on this basis, formulate their own research questions, generate source material, analyse and discuss their own source material, as well as communicate this in relation to their knowledge of existing research results.

Description of the activity: The course comprised 14 sessions over 14 weeks. In the first nine sessions, the students were introduced to the subject area, existing research positions, the associated history of the discipline of ethnology, and to my own research in the field in the form of a project on 'stories from the wardrobe, between fashion and sustainability' (working title). After this basic introduction, the students were encouraged to take an active part in an activity that serves specifically to underpin research-based teaching through case-based teaching and an innovation process, respectively. Because of the time factor, at the first session, the students had been told about the independent work that they were expected to perform later on in course: They were informed about the two activities, divided into groups and asked to start their independent work to familiarise themselves with the subject area and generate their own source material in the form of one to two 'remembrance interviews' on the subject of fashion and sustainability. A more detailed introduction and preparation took place at the seventh session. The case-based teaching was delivered at the tenth session. As preparation, the students were asked to make themselves familiar with existing research on the subject of 'fashion and sustainability' and relate the research results to a specific case: The 'Conscious' programme of the fashion company H&M. There were asked a number of questions which formed the basis for work in groups of four to prepare a research question to examine the subject, from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. At the subsequent session, the students were asked to apply their previously gained insights on their own source material through 12-minute group presentations followed by an eight-minute class discussion under the heading: Fashion and everyday life: How can consumption of fashion be made to be more sustainable than it is today? More specifically, the students were asked to present their

independent studies, relate these to existing research and, in particular, to clarify the their methodological deliberations.

Interplay between teaching and exam: The length of the presentations and subsequent discussions was decided so as to reflect the exam format of the course: oral exam on the basis of a synopsis. The course allowed the students opportunity to train for the oral exam (train their time management and academic organisational skills etc.) and train their written proficiency with regard to writing their own research question for the synopsis that will form the basis for the dialogue during the oral exam.

The outcome of the activity for the students: The students contributed actively to a topical research subject. This allowed them to feel ownership of the subject and gain an understanding of research as the 'little acorns from which mighty oaks grow'. The students were allowed to set their own agenda within the research area and, for many of the students, this was a stepping stone to finding their self-elected exam topic.

The outcome for research: It has been extremely inspiring to collaborate with the students. I have received critical feedback on my analysis work and research methodology. This has helped structure my research work, because my research project is an individual project that I would otherwise not have shared and communicated to others during the creation process. Furthermore, the course has inspired one student to write a Master's thesis on the subject area and, thus, to continue the research dialogue with me outside the framework of the course. Some aspects of the course can therefore be considered research-based.

Strengths and weaknesses of the activity: A strength of the activity is that it trains the students' ability to reflect critically in a research setting. It encourages and improves the students engagement and active participation in the subject of the course and makes the teaching less abstract and more accessible. For the teacher, the activity establishes a clear connection between research tasks and teaching obligations. However, the activity is time-consuming for both teacher and students. It requires good planning so that the students can prepare for the discussions in class and strive to meet the teacher at his or her level. The teacher will feel that it is important to always highlight the correlation between his or her own research, what is being taught, and the activities planned for the students. Furthermore, the course requires that the students have some degree of methodological training, individually or as a group, so that this 'basic' part of the activity does not impede the analytical work. The activity was therefore only possible because this course is offered at Master's level.

Further information (about the activity, links or other material):

Course plan, material for case-based teaching, material for innovation process.

Keywords:

Research-based teaching, case-based teaching, innovation process.