

Students generate empirical data through autoethnographic studies of their own study practice for a study on how students approach reading and writing

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Subject, course/other context, study level and number of students: Reading, thinking, writing - autoethnographic studies, theoretical and literary perspectives. Elective course, Bachelor's/Master's level, 7.5/10 ECTS (new/old study programme) 20 students.

The motivation behind the activity: To offer a methodology course in autoethnography and to collect empirical data for our own project, which dealt with the same research topics that the students were asked to study about themselves, i.e. reading, thinking and writing as knowledge-producing practices.

Key learning outcomes, focussing on the way in which the activity is research-based: To introduce the students to autoethnography as a methodological tool which allows them to use themselves as study objects in their own studies; to give the students an understanding of reading, thinking and writing as research methodologies; to guide the students in a study of how and whether they read, think and write in research-like ways in their own study practice.

Description of the activity: The students followed modules of three hours' duration over an eight-week period. The course concluded with a conference day. During the first two modules, the reading and teaching were allocated to an example-based and theory-based introduction to autoethnography as a study methodology and writing genre. This was followed by four weeks focussing on the curriculum and on presentations by the teacher rather than on the autoethnography aspect. The lectures dealt with reading, thinking and writing through theory and examples. Each module over the six weeks of teaching combined various elements such as presentations by the teacher or by students, writing exercises, reading exercises, focus-group interviews, class discussions, etc. At home between meetings and in class, students carried out written studies of themselves based on research questions suggested by the teacher. In addition to a diversified empirical focus, the exercises were varied both with regard to format and in the way in which the students were asked to be inquisitive in their approach.

The first six weeks of teaching and writing exercises were rounded off by preparations for a paper, which the students were asked to write at home during week seven of the course and, then, present at the concluding conference in week eight. In this context, the students handed in an abstract in which they proposed the topic of their conference paper; how they would approach the assignment methodologically; and which texts from the curriculum and other sources they planned to use.

Before the day of the conference, the students met in groups of 3-5 students which the teacher put together on the basis of a number of recurring topics in the students' papers. The groups were given a series of questions from which to plan their presentations. On the conference

day, each group was to present its papers firstly in overall terms, outlining general trends that the group had observed as common for the papers, then in terms of either content or approach, as well as in terms of the individual papers. All of the groups presented their own papers and reflected on the presentation by one other group. Following the reflection by the reflecting group, the teachers provided their reflections on the presentation and papers of the group.

Interplay between teaching and exams: Through teaching and the curriculum, the students were introduced to methodological, thematic and theoretical literature of relevance for the paper that they were to write for the concluding conference. Over the course of the weeks with teaching sessions, the students were given two different writing exercises each week, designed to familiarise them with potential topics for their papers, as well as to allow them to practice their writing skills.

The outcome of the activity for the students: The students were introduced to a research methodology and a genre of writing to which students are usually not introduced on methodology courses in Denmark. Furthermore, they were familiarised with reading, thinking and writing as theoretical and empirical topics. Finally, through the literature as well as through their own studies, they gained an understanding of reading, thinking and writing as methods for producing knowledge.

The outcome for research: Through their participation in teaching, the students provided the teachers with an idea of how they understand and practice reading, thinking and writing. However, the primary outcome was the students' writing assignments and their conference papers, which provided the teachers with rich, empirical material for their specific fields of research.

Strengths and weaknesses of the activity: The strength of the course was that it generated rich empirical material for use by the teachers in their research. Furthermore, teachers and students alike found it extremely exciting and inspiring to gain experience from a course composed of such diversified teaching elements. The students also expressed enthusiasm for their encounter with autoethnography. Furthermore, for the teachers it was very exciting to study how autoethnography can be used as an alternative to interviews, observation, document analysis, etc. in the study of a group.

The primary weakness of the course was that autoethnographic studies require thorough incorporation of the methodology, including clarifying what is not methodologically appropriate. Many students found it difficult to balance the personal and professional aspects, as well as to be systematic and methodological and integrate the theory into their studies.

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

Key words (3-5 key words):

Teaching-based research, autoethnography, reading, writing