

Teaching-based research which involves students directly in a research project through materials collection and analysis

Who is the author? Marie Sandberg and Niels Jul Nielsen, associate professors, Ethnology, Saxo Institute, Faculty of Humanities.

Subject, course/other context, study level and number of students: Master's programme in European Ethnology, educational component: Europe in the World, 15 ECTS points, 25 students.

The motivation behind the activity: By organising the *Europe in the World* course as a teaching-based research laboratory, students were given the opportunity to take part in the teacher's ongoing research project. Through their own sub-projects, the students were to generate and analyse fieldwork-based materials of relevance to the overall questions raised by the research project.

Key learning outcomes, focussing on the way in which the activity is research-based:

The course followed two tracks: An *academic track* about the shared problem definition: to examine the day-to-day consequences of free movement across the EU and how labour migration establishes new types of labour markets in Europe. The students were encouraged to prepare projects with empirical focus on Polish labour migration in the construction sector and the service industries. The objective of the second track, a *methodology track*, was to spotlight the different elements and methodologies of the research process through a number of exercises and milestones in the course, such as preparing a one-page proposal, participating in a course on database searching at the Royal Library, preparing a research review, writing an academic paper, and delivering a poster presentation at a seminar for external stakeholders.

Description of the activity: Within the shared problem definition, the students worked on their self-elected sub-projects on topics such as Polish chefs; sense of community and togetherness among laundry workers and scaffolders; the transnational network of Polish entrepreneurs; and the experience of bureaucratic barriers among newly arrived Polish migrant workers. Two projects worked with migrants from the former Yugoslavia in the city of Frederiksværk, commissioned by *Industrimuseet Frederiksværk* (local industrial museum).

The first part of the course was planned as traditional lectures introducing the class to the relevant research literature while also allowing the students to identify and define the scope of their sub-projects in groups.

The second part of the course was dedicated to field work and the development of research materials, and teacher-student contact was through workshops and supervision.

The final part of the course included a poster-presentations seminar for external stakeholders (e.g. trade unions and museums) as well as guidance on exams and academic writing.

The two tracks of the course therefore reflected a mix of teaching formats: lectures, methodology workshops, group exercises, writing exercises, guidance, and independent work in the sub-projects, including field work.

Interplay between teaching and exam: With regard to the exam format, an exemption was granted so that the students were to submit an academic paper of 12-15 pages (a curriculum of 1,200 standard pages) followed by an oral examination. Therefore, the objective was for the students to develop skills in applying ethnological theories and methodologies in specific projects, and in preparing and reporting a project in the form of a paper, which, in particular, was the objective of the teaching activities in the *methodology track*.

The outcome of the activity for the students: At the oral midterm evaluation as well as at the final written evaluation, the students clearly stated that they found the teaching format provided them with an exceptional learning outcome. In general, the students were positive, in particular toward the project-based dimension, the research methodologies and the experimental nature of the course. However, the course faced a special challenge with regard to also ensuring that the course did not become too ambitious in its requirements for the students (giving it was a 15 ECTS-point course). Some students found that the course was too demanding and did not contain enough teacher-student contact, while others could more easily see the coupling between their own sub-project and the overall research project.

The outcome for research: In addition to the obvious benefits of carrying out teaching in a field that is not only closely related to one's own research, but which could contribute new ideas and input to this research, the teaching-based research format could also be beneficial and inspirational in terms of testing new research thematics and new research paths. Furthermore, the format is suited for experimental or pilot studies that test theses in new areas or sub areas of one's own research area.

Strengths and weaknesses of the activity: Based on the experience gained from giving students different approaches to a course planned as teaching-based research, it would be advisable to plan teaching so that it includes learning activities that allow for close project feedback and at the same time allow room for a high degree of independence in groups. Feedback and teacher-student contact can be increased through project presentations, scheduled workshops during field work, as well as submission of, and comments on, abstracts and project descriptions. The element of working independently is made possible in that the groups make their own problem definitions within the overall project, structure field work independently, and in that the teacher continuously seeks to challenge the students to progress to the next step in the process.

It is also important to consider that it is not always easy to demonstrate to the students how their studies feed into the research. The research process rarely follows a straight path, and achievement of interesting outcomes cannot necessarily be fitted into the timeframe of a single course.

Further information: sandberg@hum.ku.dk

Keywords: Teaching-based research, ethnographic methodologies, a methodology track and an academic track, tailored learning activities.