



Field work which involves students working with the methodology and analyses used by the teacher in her research

Who is the author? Louise Victoria Johansen, research assistant, the Faculty of Law

Subject, course/other context, study level and number of students:

Anthropology of Law, 15-ECTS subject at Master's level offered by the Faculty of Law. 13 students.

The motivation behind the activity: The law students carry out field work within a legal subject area in order to apply a methodology which they are not familiar with, and which they cannot learn through any books. The students are introduced to my area of academic expertise, and are offered the opportunity to work within this area.

Key learning outcomes, focussing on the way in which the activity is research-based: The overall objective of the course is to provide the students with the basis for understanding and analysing the role of law in society on the basis of an anthropological theory and methodology. The specific learning outcomes for the field work are that the students should be able to design a short empirical survey independently, based on a defined problem; that they should be able to plan and execute participant observation and qualitative interviews as well as discuss methodological considerations and analytical approaches with the rest of the group. The objective is also to strengthen the students' ability to apply qualitative data on legal matters and evaluate this data critically, as well as link theory with empirical input.

Description of the activity: Shortly after start-up of the course, the group will carry out semi-structured interviews with researchers at the Faculty of Law and, subsequently, the group will observe a court case in the lower court. Together, we will prepare an observation checklist, then we will observe the court case and, finally, we will discuss our observations in relation to the observation checklist; i.e. we will evaluate our 'point of departure' and our implicit pre-expectations. Experience from these learning activities serve as a frame of reference for the remainder of the course, and, not the least, for the next step: the students' independent field work. This work fills the last one-third of the course, because, at this stage of the course, the students will have had opportunity to read a fair amount of texts presenting and analysing anthropological data within a specific law area. The students will therefore first test the methodology, then read about it, and, finally, conduct their own survey. They will prepare for this survey by identifying a topic that they would like to study, e.g. rules and practice in connection with conflict management in primary and lower secondary school; the Hippocratic Oath in practice; solicitor-client etc. communication. They submit their idea and a problem formulation to me and, subsequently, present these to the rest of the

group and receive feedback concerning focus area, methodological approach, and, finally, on a more practical note: How can we assist each other in finding the relevant people for the survey?

During the course of this field work, the group will meet and evaluate progress and discuss any problems.

As a conclusion of the fieldwork, the students are to hold a 20-minute presentation before the group about their deliberations about the fieldwork, methodological issues, and, finally, how their results can be linked to the theoretical/analytical approaches in the course curriculum, e.g.: "Does Zentropa's use of unpaid labour constitute 'semi-autonomous social fields', cf. Sally Falk Moore? After the presentation, the rest of the group provide additional suggestions for analytical approaches to the material.

Interplay between teaching and exam: The field work can both have direct and an indirect influence on the exam: some of the students choose to expand on their insights from their field work in their exam essay, which is to be around 30 pages long and based on their own problem formulation. However, regardless of whether they choose to use their field work in the exam essay, the students can use the experience to become better at coupling empirical data/examples to relevant theory from the course; to independently formulate a problem that they wish to examine; and to understand and evaluate critically the anthropological approach to the court.

The outcome of the activity for the students: See above. Several of my students have subsequently chosen their idea from the field work and/or exam essay for their thesis topic.

The outcome for research: The students may have a basis for a thesis topic, so that their field work/essay can be used in future research.

Furthermore, I often use the most interesting exam essays of former students (in an anonymised form and with the consent of the student), which are based on their own field work, in my teaching. The topics are diverse and not always closely related to my own projects, however they are very inspirational as ideas, just as the discussions on analytical approaches to the empirical material can influence my own research.

Strengths and weaknesses of the activity: The students generally put a lot of effort into the field work and become engrossed in it. The quality of the field work is therefore high, and I believe that this exercise generally helps them to write better exam papers.

The weakness is that the students do not necessarily discover this relationship between their oral presentation and the exam paper they write later on, and I am considering asking the students to prepare a written synopsis about their field work in the future, so that they also gain some academic writing experience during the course of the field work.

Keywords:

Qualitative methodology, analysis of field notes, and transcription of interviews.