Thesis circles

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Thesis circles: Feedback in Personal Learning Networks

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https://goo.gl/oRfVoJ
Agenda

Introduction of project: Problem setting (10’)
Participants‘ thoughts on issues, method & instrument (5’)
Preliminary questions of project (10’)
Plenary discussion (5’)

Example 1 - OUNL education master’s students

- Part time adult students, often with day job, family, etc.
  - Constantly changing time constraints
- OUNL academic year: 4 quartiles & summer period
- MSc = 60 credits (ECTS) at a nominal tempo of 30/year
  - Y1: Fixed pacing: one 7.5 credit course per period
  - Y2: Flexible seminar & master thesis
- Individual online learning, some learning activities in pairs
- Community / network?
  - Little or no institutional support in VLE
  - Social media (FB / Whatsapp)
  - Ad hoc groupings within courses (pairs, small groups)
Problem Setting

University as a place where learners

- come for personal learning and development (towards a degree)
- spend time on developing their personal (learning) network

Various constellations of social interaction

- lecture, group work, individual work, online/f2f, etc.

Members of personal (learning) networks

- fellow students, instructors, tutors, colleagues, family members, etc.
Problem Setting (cont’d)

How do learners use their Personal Learning Network in relation to feedback?

Focus: thesis writing groups / thesis circles
My thesis is written in

- Blood
- Sweat
- Tears
- and COFFEE.

www.phdcomics.com
Focus on Thesis circles

Definition: Formal or semi-formal group of up to 3 or 5 Master’s students, often with the same supervisor, whose academic work is partially related to a same subject

Exploratory research:

- What forms do they take?
- What are the main issues?
- What forms of interaction or feedback take place?
CAUTION
THESIS
WRITING
IN PROGRESS

! CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE. INQUIRE ABOUT STATUS AT YOUR OWN RISK. PROD GENTLY IF ASLEEP.

WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM
Example 2 (which I heard about at lunch today)

Danish University of Aalborg

- Known for its group-based approach of teaching (similar to Roskilde U)
- Is moving away from group thesis writing in recent years at request of students
  - Too many dependencies
  - Delays, complications

(Thanks to Steffen from @UniWISE and @mik_lauritzen from @aula_education for the data point)
Do you use Thesis circles at your university?
What are the issues? (input from audience)

Process vs subject

Issues with group functioning

Suggestions for further info

- Thesis whisperer
- GO-OPEN GOGN (Chrissy, Catherine, Thom)
Why all amazing writers have writing groups

http://writingjourney.co/featured/writing-groups-amazing-every-writer-needs-one/
Research design

Preliminary Qualitative Interviews in parallel with literature review

- With supervisors at different institutions
- With ALTC-participants
- Goal: identify issues, get feedback on research design, assess usefulness

Actual study:

- Mixed methods: collect experiences through questionnaire & interviews
- Can we identify the contextual variables in the use of a thesis circle set-up?
Online writing groups: Good or bad idea?
Previous work after quick search


Preliminary interview guide

https://goo.gl/Aqkjxv
Preliminary Questions

Communication is the central topic - but can we identify its defining factors?

- Who arranges it and why?
- Different priorities / goals / …

What is the underlying goal of using a thesis circle?

- Improve communication between supervisor and student?
- More innovative Masters’ research?
- Creating shared knowledge base/commons?
Preliminary Questions

Institutional Support

- What is essential support? What is nice to have?

Feedback inside and outside a thesis circle

- How does feedback within a thesis circle relate to feedback outside the thesis circle?
- How does it relate to feedback in the wider PLN?
Plenary discussion

Thesis circle or comparative structures

Interaction & feedback

Personal Learning Network
WRITING YOUR THESIS:

- Thinking about writing your thesis
- Actually writing your thesis
- Fiddling with LaTeX/Word trying to get insignificant formatting details to look nice