

altc21 Submission 31

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Title:	Toolkit for thesis circles
Author keywords:	thesis circles group supervision research supervision pedagogy instructional design
Abstract:	<p>Thesis circles are small collaborative groups in which students, together with one or more supervisors, conduct research on the same subject or theme. Using these circles is an emerging practice for research supervision, allowing for both comprehensive support and guidance (including peers) for the thesis task, as well as a workable solution for the workload of teachers (Romme & Nijhuis, 2002). But setting up a thesis circle is not trivial. Research supervision in general is regarded as "the most advanced level of teaching" (Buttery et al., 2005), yet thesis supervisors mostly learn from experience without any support. Although training is likely to improve the effectiveness of thesis supervision, its effect is not yet confirmed with empirical results. A similar approach is for senior supervisors to share their aggregated experience with novices. However, it is difficult for senior supervisors to articulate tacit knowledge in their supervisory approaches and strategies. A third way used quite extensively in the Dutch higher education is to provide ready-to-use manuals for novice supervisors to follow, but these manuals often focus more on thesis content than on the didactics, such as social/peer learning approaches and teaching small groups comprised of heterogeneous student backgrounds in research and writing skills.</p> <p>This leads to our motivation to develop a toolkit that empowers supervisors to design thesis circles in which students interact with content, peers and the supervisor(s), and co-construct knowledge from the interaction activities. Our toolkit is a collective set of design questions and resources based on i) our typology of thesis circles with six dimensions (goal, structure, guidance, culture, effectiveness/quality and risk factors) (Rajagopal et al., 2020); ii) the Activity Centred Analysis and Design (ACAD) framework with three design dimensions (set, epistemic and social) at three levels (macro, meso and micro) (Yeoman & Carvalho, 2019); and iii) a scoping review of what makes good thesis circles and group supervision practices.</p> <p>This workshop starts with presenting ongoing development of the toolkit. First, we demonstrate how to use the design questions and resources of the toolkit to stimulate circle designers to carry out needs-assessment and developing tasks and interaction activities that promote transfer. For example, a design question related to the "guidance" dimension within our typology, formulated at the epistemic micro level of the ACAD framework, could be: How do you ensure effectiveness of feedback formulated by supervisors and student peers? The corresponding resource could be the feedback profiling tool (JISC, n.d.). Second, we share our experience in trying out the toolkit to elicit senior supervisors' experience and strategies and gather more design questions from novice supervisors. Third, we show the functional design of an interactive decision-making tool that deals with inter-relationships among different design dimensions and that facilitates the designer to determine the optimal combination of various design dimensions.</p> <p>Finally, we will invite the participants (divided into groups) to evaluate the design questions and resources on one assigned dimension of our circle typology. The evaluation results will be used to improve the effectiveness of our toolkit.</p>
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