



# Thesis circles:

## Feedback in Personal Learning Networks

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# 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.



<https://educationtechnologysolutions.com.au/2014/07/why-you-need-a-personal-learning-network/>

# 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



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# 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. PROP GENTLY IF ASLEEP.

# 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

# 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?

NOW  
NOVEL



## Writing Groups for Doctoral Education and Beyond

Innovations in practice and theory

Edited by Claire Aitchison and Cally Guerin





# Previous work after quick search

Aghaee, N., Hansson, H., (2013). *Peer Portal : Quality Enhancement in Thesis Writing Using Self-Managed Peer Review on a Mass Scale*. INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING 14: 186-203. doi: 10.19173/irrodl.v14i1.1394.

Vehvilainen, Sanna. (2009). *Problems in the Research Problem: Critical Feedback and Resistance in Academic Supervision*. Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research 53: 185-201. doi: 10.1080/00313830902757592.

# 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:

