

# Thesis circles

## Citation for published version (APA):

Rajagopal, K., Hsiao, Y. P., Vrieling - Teunter, E. M., & Verjans, S. M. E. (2018). *Thesis circles: Feedback in Personal Learning Networks [18-96]*. Abstract from 25th Annual conference of the Association for Learning Technology, Manchester, United Kingdom. <https://goo.gl/oRfVoJ>

## Document status and date:

Published: 13/09/2018

## Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

## Document license:

CC BY

## Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

## General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

<https://www.ou.nl/taverne-agreement>

## Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

[pure-support@ou.nl](mailto:pure-support@ou.nl)

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

Downloaded from <https://research.ou.nl/> on date: 29 Nov. 2020

Open Universiteit  
[www.ou.nl](http://www.ou.nl)





# Thesis circles:

## Feedback in Personal Learning Networks

dr. Steven Verjans<sup>1</sup>, dr. Kamakshi Rajagopal<sup>2</sup>  
dr. Ya Ping (Amy) Hsiao<sup>3</sup>, dr. Emmy Vrieling<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Open University of The Netherlands

<sup>2</sup> Independent researcher

<sup>3</sup> Tilburg University



# 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



JORGE CHAM © 2013

# 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:

