

Guiding Thesis Circles in HE

Reflections on practice-based research

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**What's it all
about?**



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Thesis Circles

- Thesis
 - Guided Independent Research work
 - Academic Writing
 - Different expectations at different levels (Bachelor's, Master's PhD)

- Small collaborative groups in which students, together with one or more supervisors, conduct research on the same subject or theme

Thesis Circles: Research themes

- Design of thesis circles
- Teacher support for thesis circles
- Student Perception of thesis circles*
- Teacher experience and priorities for thesis circles*
- Self-regulation; feedback literacy; peer learning
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Our research team





Dr. Inge van
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Organisational
psychology



Dr. Ya Ping (Amy)
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Peer learning and
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Dr. Kamakshi Rajagopal
Networked Learning
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Dr. Emmy Vrieling-
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Networked Learning
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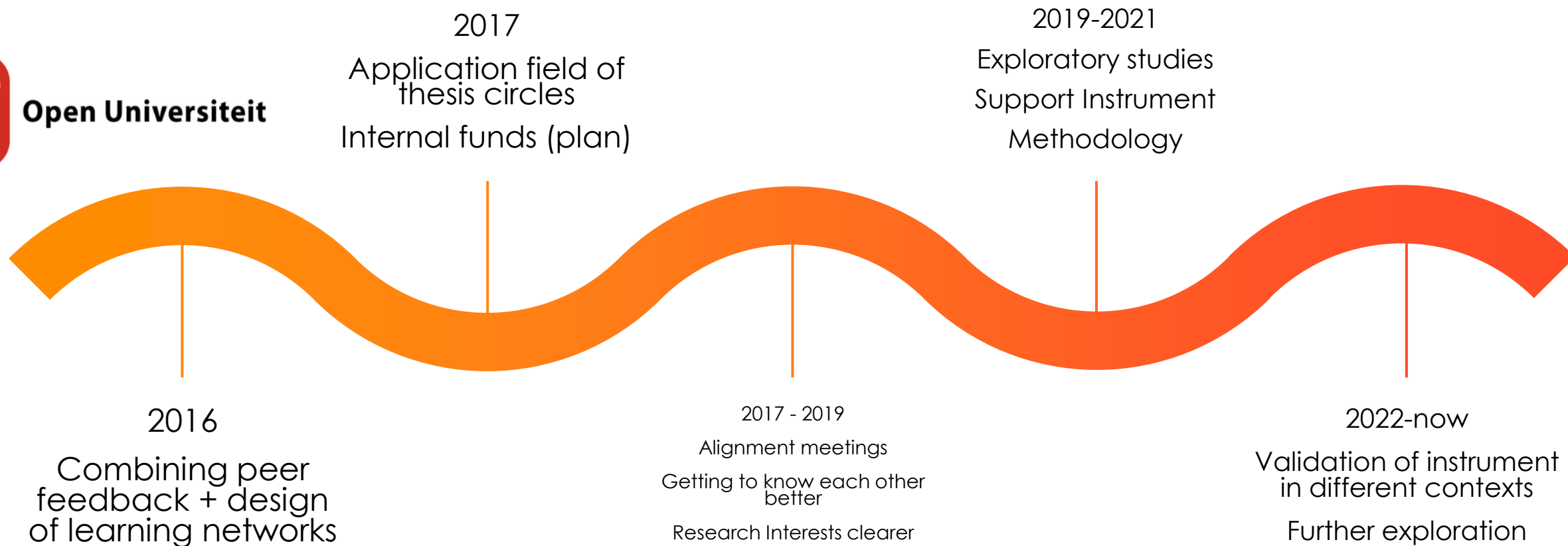
Dr. Steven Verjans
Teacher Professional
Development and
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**Our journey so
far...**





Open Universiteit



Some publications

- Rajagopal, K., Hsiao, Y. P., Vrieling-Teunter, E. M., & Verjans, S. M. E. (2018, September). Thesis circles: Feedback in Personal Learning Networks [18-96]. In *25th Annual conference of the Association for Learning Technology*.
- Rajagopal, K., Hsiao, A., Verjans, S., Vrieling, E., & Van Seggelen-Damen, I. (2019, June). Afstudeerkringen in het HO: Naar een Typologie en Ontwerprichtlijnen: HO–rondetafelgesprek 247. In *Onderwijs research dagen: Onwijs Onderwijs*.
- Rajagopal, K., Vrieling-Teunter, E., Hsiao, Y.P A., Van Seggelen-Damen, I., Verjans, S. with Rajagopal, K. (corresp. author) (2021). Guiding thesis circles in higher education: towards a typology. *Professional Development In Education*, 1-18. [doi: 10.1080/19415257.2021.1973072](https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2021.1973072)

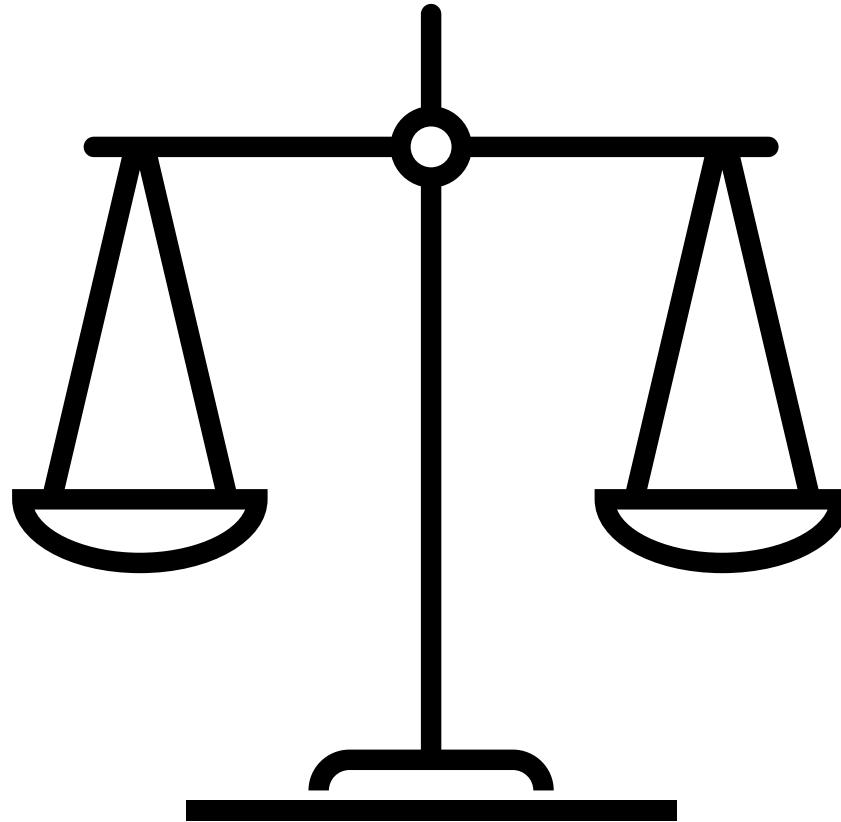
Our aims



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Balancing research with relevance in practice

- Individual Expertise development
- Theoretical advancements
- Understanding better where our domains overlap



- Relevant Research
- Teacher Support
- Improving Practice

Challenges



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Challenge 1: Expertise Domains

- Complementary expertise domains
- Understanding each others' interests, goals and experiences
- Primacy of practical needs – "What will help teachers most?"
- Co-working days
 - Open discussions
 - Open mindset
 - Bringing structure afterwards

Challenge 2: Theoretical foundations

- Different disciplines means different theoretical foundations
- Comes together in Practice - but there are few theoretical frameworks where different disciplines can be brought together
- Writing together is interesting!
- Educational Design Framework (McKenney & Reeves, 2018) as methodology
 - To support theoretical advancements
 - To support maturity of practice

Challenge 3: Data collection

- Different institutions -> different contexts
- Our methodologies are defined to deal with different contexts
- Many opportunities but also difficult to plan
- Individual initiatives – with team support
- Practicalities (e.g. where do we ask for ethical approval?)
- No Funding – Driven by interest & opportunity

Opportunities





Opportunity 1: Broad scope of relevant expertise in team

- Expertise in team allows us to take the broad scope that practice-based research needs
- Practice-based research requires taking broad perspective
- When it comes to defining research, we (need to) narrow down – but it becomes a choice how we do this and what is most relevant
- Many of our discussions concern our assessment of what practice needs and where we should invest our efforts

Opportunity 2: Shared Leadership

- Team works on principles of shared leadership
- Initiatives are taken by all to write, to develop new tracks, etc. depending on availability and interests
- Sharing of articles, conferences, etc.
- Regular meetings (and this needs to be followed up)

Opportunity 3: Different perspectives on practice

- We all work in different roles with respect to practice
 - Assessment specialist
 - Director of educational programme
 - Embedded researcher
 - Academic researchers
 - ...
- Identify opportunities to learn together and benefit all our work

Future



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Ongoing studies

- Studies on Student Experience of Thesis circles
- More accessible teacher support

Future outcomes

- Academic publications
- Book on thesis circles
 - Thesis writing
 - Networked structures
 - Self-regulation
 - Feedback
- Website aimed at practitioners

More information

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THANK YOU

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