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**The power of the group in graduate student supervision  
An empirical study of group based supervision combined with student  
groups and individual supervision**

**Introduction and background**

The writing of a research based thesis represents a formidable challenge for graduate students, and supervision and mentoring are important success factors (Zuber-Skerrit & Ryan 1994, Burgess 1994, Deem & Brehony 2000). In spite of the increasing amount of research on supervision in the emerging research field of pedagogy in higher education, little attention has been paid until recently to writing and text based supervision (Lee 1998: 121). Most of the research literature focuses on postgraduate supervision (Wisker et al 2003). This paper reports on a follow-up to a comprehensive interview study of supervisors' and master students' experiences with traditional individual supervision practices at the University of Bergen. The previous interview study identified three supervision models, the teacher-student-model, the partnership model and the apprenticeship model, each with their strengths and weaknesses (Dysthe 2002). The study also confirmed the vulnerability of the individual supervisor-student relationship which has been documented in other studies (Burgess 1994, Zuber-Skerrit & Ryan 1994, Yeatman 1998). In order to create a richer learning environment and better supervision and advisory practices for master students, the new Master of Education Programme at the University of Bergen has tried out a three pronged model which combines 1) supervision groups consisting of two supervisors<sup>1</sup> and their master students 2) student groups consisting of the same 6 students (without teachers) and 3) individual supervision. The aim of this study is to describe and analyze this model of supervising and supporting master degree students in their thesis work, with particular attention to factors that improve the learning potential and the completion rate.

**Research questions**

The overarching research questions were: *How did the combination of supervision groups, student groups and individual supervision function as support for master students' research and writing process? What effect did this have, if any, on the quality of the thesis and the completion rate?* The more specific research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What were the most important contextual and practical aspects of group supervision?

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<sup>1</sup> 'Supervisor' and 'supervision' is here used in line with the Australian tradition, instead of the more common American term 'research advisor' or 'mentor' and 'mentoring'. The Norwegian term 'veileder' has connotations both of mentor, advisor and supervisor, but includes the whole spectrum of supervision models. Also note that we use 'professor', 'supervisor' and 'teacher' as synonyms in this paper. All graduate supervisors are professors and academic teachers, with the exception of external advisors, for instance from research institutions, who may act as a second supervisor.

2. What conditions did students identify as crucial for good feedback?
3. What were the differences between the supervision groups and the student groups?
4. What did students see as the particular learning potential in each of the two kinds of groups and how did this compare to individual supervision?
5. What are the critical factors for the success of this kind of supervision model, when success is understood as student satisfaction, high quality and high completion rate?

### **Method and materials**

The nature of the research questions as well as our basic theoretical perspectives warranted an empirical study and a predominantly qualitative methodology. This paper is based primarily on a net-based questionnaire and individual interviews with students. It is supplemented with student evaluations of group supervision over a four year period and information from a comprehensive data base consisting of tape recordings of four 2-hour long supervision group sessions, including evaluation by teachers and students of each of the sessions. The analytical categories have been developed partly from the empirical material itself and partly from theory. The analysis in this paper is still on a preliminary stage.

### **Theoretical perspectives**

Supervision of students' research and writing processes is an important aspect of teaching and learning at universities and should be understood in light of theories of knowledge and learning as well as theories of communication and text. Our perspective is based on sociocultural theories, particularly dialogism (Bakhtin 1981, 1986, Rommetveit 1992, Vygotsky 1978, 1987, Nystrand 1992, Wertsch 1991, 1998, Wenger 1998, Säljö 2000) and the concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998).

This paper focuses specifically on how group interaction can supplement traditional individual supervision. In an earlier study, Dysthe has documented the learning potential of dialogic interaction and in particular the interpenetration of writing and talk in classrooms (Dysthe, 1996). Acknowledging Bakhtin's notion of how understanding and learning emerges from the interplay of voices, 'multivoicedness' became a key term. In the university context, we wanted to find out how students and supervisors themselves experienced different forms of multivoiced interaction as useful mediation in the research and writing process.

Underlying the major research questions are theoretical concepts crucial to the discussion of our findings. One set of concepts derives from Bakhtin's dialogism; the others are the notions of *discourse community* and *disciplinarity*. Dialogism is important because the co-construction of knowledge is essential to communication processes generally and the supervision process in particular. "Discourse community" and "disciplinarity" have been central concepts in crossdisciplinary studies of writing for the last twenty years, and we briefly discuss their relevance to our material

Bakhtin's dialogism represents an alternative analytical perspective and epistemology to monologism, which still is the dominant paradigm in linguistics, cognitive psychology, information technology, and communication (Linell, 1998; Markova & Foppa, 1990, 1991; Wold, 1992). Where monologism sees knowledge as a given, dialogism sees knowledge as emerging from interaction of voices; and where monologism is concerned with transmission of knowledge, dialogism is concerned with transformation of understandings (Nystrand, 1997). As Wertsch (1991) has pointed out, the communication model of monologism (often called "the conduit metaphor," after Reddy, 1979) is deeply entrenched in the Western way of thinking and clearly opposed to the co-construction of knowledge through dialogical interaction that is at the heart of Bakhtin's work. This distinction is important when discussing supervision, a communicative activity wherein students learn through interactions with their supervisors. In a previous analysis of supervision relationships, Dysthe (2002) found that

some were clearly based on monological views of how knowledge is created and rely on authoritative transmission of the supervisor's comments, while others revealed dialogical views and practice.

Another central aspect of dialogism is that words always carry with them the voices and accents of other users. Learning, according to Bakhtin, can be seen as gradual appropriation of the words of others to make them our own:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intentions. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293)

For master students, enculturation entails appropriation of ways of thinking, speaking, and writing in the particular discipline. However, the two concepts are not the same, as *enculturation* emphasizes the cultural element of the process from the perspective of the discipline (students are being enculturated *into* the discipline), while *appropriation* points to the internalization process of the individual. An important issue for supervision is which communicative models are most suitable for appropriation. Bakhtin's account of "authoritative" versus "internally persuasive" discourse (1981, pp. 342-348) offers a relevant distinction for discussing supervision practices because it combines an understanding of a person's dialogic appropriation of social languages and the ways outside forces assert their influences. The authoritative word demands that the listener acknowledges it, as it bears previous authority and is hierarchical and distanced. It binds the listener regardless of any power it may have to persuade him or her internally; it does not demand free reflection about its content, but "our unconditional allegiance" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343). In contrast, internally persuasive discourse is affirmed by the power of its argument "as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with 'one's own word'" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 345). We will argue that the supervision and student groups are major arenas for our master students' appropriation of educational thinking and discourse, where the 'alien' word of authoritative authors as well as the local supervisor gradually become their own through written and oral interaction.

The dialogic co-construction of knowledge is a particularly pertinent, though sometimes underrated, element in academic knowledge production. At universities it takes place in culturally defined spaces, and the concepts of discourse communities and disciplines are attempts to define such cultures. For master students learning as reproduction of the thoughts of others is clearly insufficient, and the socialization into the disciplinary culture is a vital element in their development.

In theories of 'situated cognition' learning is seen basically as a process of enculturation into a "community of practice" (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989, Lave & Wenger 1991). While the term 'discourse communities' focuses on the linguistic aspects of disciplines, the term 'communities of practice' is much wider. A community of practice is characterized by *mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoires* (Lave & Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998). Students may belong to many communities of practice at different levels and in different contexts, and we will argue that supervision and student groups function best if students and teachers see themselves as participants in "communities of practice". According to the definition above, this means that the group must 1) share a mutual engagement in the particular task (for instance project plan development, textual improvement) 2) be willing to define this as a joint enterprise and 3) share 'repertoires'. "Participation" is both personal and social, and to participate involves "a complex process that suggests both action and connection. It combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and belonging" (Wenger 1998, p. 56). Participation includes all kinds of relations, not just

collaborative, but also conflictual and competitive. This is in keeping with Bakhtin's view of dialogue where the creative potential lies in the tension between multiple voices and conflicting perspectives (Bakhtin 1986, Dysthe 2001).

### **Contextualization**

The Master of education programmes at Norwegian universities take two years of fulltime study after finished Bachelor's degree. The first year students have to take a series of courses and the second year is devoted to a research project and the writing of a thesis. Traditionally few students have managed to finish within this time frame, but after the Quality Reform of Higher education instituted by Parliamentary Proposition 27, 2002, completion on time is a high priority of the departments.<sup>2</sup> Our master programme started in 2000 and it has been characterized by an effort to bridge the theory-practice gap and a sociological and humanistic bias. Our students have all worked for some years in a profession, most of them in teaching, special education and the health services and they have chosen empirical research projects. Such projects are very time consuming, both in the project development, data collection and analysis, and students need a very thorough grounding in both methodology and educational theory. Their self confidence in theoretical discussions and particularly in academic writing is often rather low, and for this reason a weekly writing workshop runs throughout the first semester, parallel to seminars where dialogue and discussion are crucial. Enculturation into the discipline of education involves learning how to talk and write about educational problems, using different theoretical perspectives. Students are encouraged to find a research topic as early as possible and then relate the general education courses to their topic. Thus the appropriation of academic thought and language, which is such an important prerequisite of writing a thesis, starts from day one, but is particularly a focus of our supervision groups.

Group supervision has been a planned and integral part of the teaching and learning environment in this master programme from the beginning, and systematic student evaluations have been the basis for improvements.

### **Description and discussion of the practical organization of the groups**

The term 'practical organization' includes what Wenger calls 'repertoires', i.e. rules and routines for how the groups organize their work in preparation for and during the group sessions. We have found the strategies and routines to be extremely important for successful functioning of the groups, and for this reason we will describe them in some detail. The table below will clarify some of the differences and similarities between the supervision groups and the student support groups and the text will discuss some aspects in more detail.

<b>Organization, routines and characteristic traits of supervision groups and student groups</b>	
<b>Supervision groups</b>	<b>Student groups</b>
Supervisors participate (2-3 + their master students)	Only students present
Regular, 2 hour meetings (every week in 2. semester, every third week in 3. & 4. sem.)	Less frequent meetings (time and length regulated by the needs of the participants)
Attendance compulsory if signed up (contractual)	Attendance voluntary (collegial, personal obligation)

obligation)	
Strictly structured meetings (formal)	Less structured meetings (informal)
Clear leadership of each session	Clear leadership
Topics: discipline centred, non-personal	Topics: discipline centred or personal, emotional support
Project oriented discussion and advice	Discussions centred on students' needs:
Student drafts (2-3 pages written text pr. student)	Drafts, topical journal articles, theory
One/few students in focus each time	All group members may be in focus
Organized conversations/discussions	Unorganized conversations, 'think aloud'
Major purpose: Project progression	Major purpose: personal and disciplinary support
Evaluation and metareflection after each session	No evaluation

Fig 1: Organization, routines and characteristic traits of the work in supervision groups and student groups  
*Key factors of the supervision groups: regularity, structure, leadership, mutual obligation*  
 On the timetable for the second semester "Group supervision" replaces the "writing workshops" in first semester. The characteristic features of the supervision groups can be summarized by regularity, structure, leadership, obligation and project focus, while the colloquies are informal, less structured and regulated by students' needs. These two groups thus supplement one another and cater for different aspects of students needs. The optimal size is in our experience 6-8 participants, including supervisors. Fewer participants would result in fewer perspectives and larger groups would mean too many projects in each group. The groups in principle consist of two supervisors and all their master students, but it is voluntary for students to participate. Once they do sign up, however, there is a strong contractual obligation of regular attendance. Experience has shown this to be a key factor of success, and both students and teachers comment on the importance of the strong obligation to attend and to participate actively both in the form of giving constructive feedback to peers and in the discussion. There are no "free riders" in these groups.

Earlier research on writing groups at master student level (Dysthe 1997) has shown that the most important reason for group failure was irregular attendance and lack of mutual obligation and commitment. It is time consuming to read fellow students research projects drafts and to give feedback, and time is a very precious commodity; hence the mutuality: "I invest time in your project if you do the same in mine." Establishing structures for building a thorough knowledge of each others' projects and collective mutual responsibility is an important challenge that initially rest on the teachers in the groups. In our particular context we try to achieve this by three means. First, in the writing workshops during the first semester students get used to sharing their project ideas as well as their written, unfinished drafts, and they learn the rules and routines for such groups. Second, students write a theory based article in the second semester on a topic relevant for their research project, and students' present these orally for one another. Immediately afterwards (March-April) the mentoring groups are established. Third, during the first group meeting all students present their project plan ideas as far as they have come at that time, both in writing and orally. In order to motivate our students for participating in group supervision, we invite students who have finished their thesis to talk about their experiences and the benefits they have got from investing time in the group work. Such motivation is necessary because many students are initially very sceptical to collective activities, partly because the academic tradition is very individualistic and partly because some students have negative experience with earlier group work.

### *Process writing strategies in supervision groups*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In the article "Helping doctoral students to finish their theses" Lonka (2003) describes a process-writing course which integrates many of the same elements.

Because systematic teaching of academic writing has not been part of the Norwegian university tradition until very recently, process writing strategies are new to most of our students. We have very good experience with transferring the feedback structure from writing workshops to the groups. This means that the students who are in focus each time, distribute a draft (max. 3 pages) to the group on email together with an explanation of the context as well as questions for the group and formulation of specific problems for discussion. The latter has proved very useful, as trying to formulate what the problem is, often constitute half of the solution. At the same time it makes it easier for the reader to give focused feedback. The students are encouraged to choose problems and examples that are common to other students. In the project planning phase the formulation and narrowing of research questions is a recurrent problem as well as theoretical basis, in the data collection phase students share field experiences and later on questions of analysis and interpretation are common ground. And every time writing itself is centre stage, with peers and supervisors providing feedback and advice.

The feedback and discussion sessions follow well known strategies: the student's short oral presentation of key aspects of the written draft is followed by a round of comments from every group member; the student in focus refrain from defending his or her own text, but determines the topics of the free discussion after the round of comments.<sup>4</sup> In one of the groups students started to tape the session and they found it so useful to listen to the tape afterwards that this has become a routine in the group.<sup>5</sup> The initial fear of some members that their 'stupid' comments were recorded, soon waned. Students themselves underline that they learnt a lot, not only from listening to the comments from others, but also from listening to how they themselves talked about their own project, answered questions and clarified for the group "what I actually meant". The interplay of writing and talk seems to be very productive in this setting also.

#### *Consensus among students about strategies, training and metacommunication*

Some clear findings emerged from the survey and the interviews regarding student views of the practical organization and group strategies. There was consensus about the importance of the good planning, structure, continuity and mutual obligation for the quality of the group work and their motivation and learning. Students also agreed that systematic training in useful feedback strategies and group behaviour was vital for the groups in order to function well. "Giving students the tools to succeed" had been high on our priority list this year, because last time we had taken for granted that students were familiar with such strategies and were critiqued for not being thorough and systematic enough in our training for the tasks we gave them. Training in response giving, for instance, was practical, but was given a theoretical basis. Students commented that "training in response strategies was necessary in order to break old feedback patterns and help us find a balance between free dialogue and systematic and prepared feedback" (Interview 'Anne' 2003).

Meta-communication and reflection was another element of success of the supervision groups brought up by the students. By ending each session with a round of reflection on what each participant had experienced as positive, negative, useful or a waste of time, students and teachers alike became more tuned in to each others' needs. This was also a space for emotional and personal comments after an often strenuous and problem focused session. Many useful suggestions for improvement came up, and because these were either supported or rejected by the group right away, collective recollection saw to it that they followed up.

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<sup>4</sup> Torlaug L. Hoel has called this the classical feedback strategy (Hoel 2000).

<sup>5</sup> At the Writing Centre ("Formidlingscenteret") at the University of Copenhagen master students have been encouraged to tape their own project conversation with a centre person who mainly listens.

Besides, because these were education students, the meta-communication gave a wider perspective on what they were doing and added insight in supervision, group and writing processes.

In the student groups, the informality, openness and personal commitment to one another that developed over time, turned out to be invaluable and clearly appreciated by the students. The emotional side of carrying out a research project and writing a thesis is often under-communicated, and our students took this aspect seriously. Because *trust* was necessary for optimal functioning of the support groups, students emphasized that only by being participants in both, were they able to get to know one another well enough to develop close ties and commitments. Again time is an issue and there is no short cut to success of such groups. If forced to choose between the two kinds of groups, most students would keep the supervision group, but all of them underlined how the two groups supplemented one another.

### Giving and getting response

Response to written text has been a major topic in writing research from the late 1970-ies (i.e. Nystrand, Freedman, Sperling, Hoel) (sjekk Kluwerboka) , and our study was not designed to bring new insight in response. It is, however, of interest to see how master students with no previous experience of process writing and response giving describe the crucial elements for good response in a group context.

Master students' list of crucial factors for good response in groups	
Trust and safety	Important in order to dare to reveal problems and accept suggestions.
Sensitivity	Equally important for teachers and peers. Sensitivity towards other students, particularly the one in focus.
Respect	a) Mutual respect, regardless of intellectual capacity b) Respect for the dynamics of the group process.
Preparations	a) Good knowledge of the text. Preparation is a key factor. b) Understand what the needs of the writer.
Dialogue	Dialogical response ideal in a group setting, but time consuming.
Engagement	Personal. Positive. Critical. Characteristics of engagement needed in response-giving.

Fig. 2: Master students' list of crucial factors for good response in groups

It is interesting that trust, safety, sensitivity and respect tops the list. This tells us that feedback has a very strong relational component that cannot be disregarded in any supervisory context. This finding corroborates similar findings in a research study on writing and supervision in three disciplines at the University of Bergen, where master students and supervisors were asked to describe good supervision practices (Dysthe & Breistein 2001, Dysthe 2002). 'Respect' was a recurrent word when students talked about what they wanted from their supervisor, and this included understanding and sensitivity in the particular vulnerable situation of an unexperienced research student. Several students in the previous study confided that they were very nervous in one-to-one sessions with the supervisor, particularly in the beginning, and that they avoided handing in unfinished texts for feedback; a situation which prolonged their writing process. The question of sharing early draft versions turned out to be a crucial one, both in the 2001/2002- study of individual supervision and in the present one. This is one of the issues in our comparison of the three supervision arenas, visualised in Fig. 3 below.

### Comparison of group supervision, student groups and individual supervision

<b>Student groups</b>	<b>Group supervision</b>	<b>Individual supervision</b>
Multivoiced, many perspectives	Multivoiced, many perspectives	Monological or dialogical
<b>Fellow students</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “safe haven”</li> <li>- share problems</li> <li>- provide personal support and comfort, encouragement</li> <li>- push for completion</li> <li>- flexibility, impulsivity</li> </ul>	<b>Two supervisors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- divergent voices</li> <li>- disciplinary knowledge</li> <li>- authority</li> <li>- structure</li> <li>- interesting discussions</li> <li>- strong on theory &amp; method</li> <li>- strategic focus</li> <li>- models for peer mentoring</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<b>Own supervisor</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- engages in project</li> <li>- shares responsibility</li> <li>- pushes thesis progression</li> <li>- emphasizes quality</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- longer texts</li> <li>- low threshold (easy to share)</li> <li>- “first filter” – try out ideas</li> <li>- real readers: “I don’t understand..”</li> <li>- build confidence</li> <li>- good at reformulating and asking questions</li> <li>- honest and blunt</li> </ul>	<b>Feedback</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- short texts</li> <li>- high threshold (anxiety of sharing unfinished text)</li> <li>- supportive and critical</li> <li>- many suggestions, new ideas</li> <li>- new literature references</li> </ul>	<b>Feedback</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- written and oral</li> <li>- short and long texts</li> <li>- focus on structure</li> <li>- focus on all levels in text, depending on stage of thesis</li> <li>- revision: many versions of same text</li> </ul>
<b>Peer assessment and training in self assessment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- community building through common experiences and frames of reference</li> <li>- appropriation through writing and talking</li> </ul>	<b>Inculturation into disciplinary discourse community</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- models</li> <li>- community building through common experiences and frames of reference</li> <li>- appropriation through writing, talking and listening</li> </ul>	<b>Awareness of standards and quality assurance</b>

Fig. 3: Comparison of some aspects of student groups, group supervision, and individual supervision

Multivoicedness is a key feature in both group arenas, and the one most often commented on by the students. This is the basis of the power of the group. According to Bakhtin (1986) the juxtaposition of voices is not enough, it is the tension between diverging voices that creates the potential for new understandings (see also student quotation below). It therefore makes sense when one of the suggestions for improvement of the supervision groups was “teachers should disagree more often”. One effect of group supervision could be that dialogue has been firmly established as the communicative mode, and that this would colour the individual supervision. We do not have empirical material to confirm this, but our impression certainly is that what Dysthe (2002) called the Partnership Model of supervision is more common than the Teaching Model<sup>6</sup> in this context. On the other hand the supervisor has to secure the quality of the thesis, and may therefore assume the authoritative teacher position.

<sup>6</sup> The Teaching Model describes a traditional teacher-student relationship defined by an emphasis on asymmetry, status difference, and dependency. Feedback is seen as correction, and students rarely hand in exploratory texts. This model may be driven by the supervisor’s conceptualization of the relationship, but just as often by the student’s expectations and by a joint focus on effectiveness in relation to producing an acceptable thesis.

The Partnership Model is more symmetrical: the student’s thesis is seen as a joint project. The contractual nature of cooperation is emphasized. Feedback is presented in dialogue, and exploratory texts form a basis for discussion. There seems to be a more conscious pedagogical philosophy behind this model, and the supervisor aims at fostering independent thinking.

The Apprenticeship Model is characterized by the student’s learning by observing and performing tasks in the company of the supervisor. The student and the supervisor may be involved in a joint project, but there is no doubt about who is the master. This model is distinguished from the Partnership Model in that the supervisor assumes a much clearer authority base that is recognized by both parties. It is distinguished from the Teaching Model by its cooperative nature, often as part of a larger research team. (Dysthe 2002, p.00)

The general differences between the three arenas that are listed in fig. 3 are rather self-evident and will not be commented on any further, and the same goes for how the three arenas have different functions regarding feedback. The final comparison, however, is our attempt to focus on *one* aspect where each of the three arenas has a unique contribution to offer. We suggest that group supervision provides the most important arena for disciplinary inculturation, that student groups provide training in self-assessment and that individual supervision provides the necessary quality assurance.

Students emphasised that there was a strong inner connection between the three arenas; not only did they supplement one another, - the success of one was actually dependent on the other two. A quotation from one of the student interviews illustrates this:

When I feel very uncertain, I prefer to bring the issue or the text up in my student group first. This is a very safe place as we have got to know each other well on a personal level, as well as our projects, and they will tell me if I am way out. I then feel confident presenting another version in group supervision, where I know I will get many comments. Actually I prefer when there is disagreement among the supervisors; this helps me think better and more critically. ... What has happened in group supervision is often brought into the student group, where we continue the discussions, remind one another of important points, and discuss the implication for each of our projects. ... Then I use the input from both groups when I write the drafts that I present to my supervisor. I have sorted out quite a lot by then, and I can give him longer texts (student A, 2003).

When focusing on *one* aspect where each of the three arenas has a unique contribution to offer, our interpretation is that group supervision provides the most important arena for *inculturation into the thinking and discourse of the discipline*, that the safe environment of the student groups affords training in peer and self-assessment and that individual supervision provides the necessary quality assurance.

### **Critical factors of success**

Success is here understood as high quality texts (research based theses), high completion rate and student satisfaction. The success is undisputable, as 7 of 10 master students completed their Master's degrees within the time limit of two years with very good results. Four of the students got the grade 1.9 (on a scale from 1- 4, where 1 is top). In this discipline very few students get grades below 2, and their result is therefore excellent. The students themselves ascribed a good portion of the success to the effect of the groups. Comments from the external assessors underlined the good craftsmanship of the research and the high quality academic texts.

In our view writing at this level cannot be seen as an isolated activity; as stated in the introduction it is deeply embedded in the disciplinary culture. As a result the improvement of academic writing is not primarily dependent on skills training, but on enculturation and appropriation of the thinking and discourse in the discipline. This warrants an integrated approach, where research and writing are closely connected throughout the whole process, where the interaction of writing and talk is a systematic part of the strategic approach in group settings, and where multiple readers and discussion partners provide critical opposition and thus help develop the students' ability to handle different perspectives in their text and to appropriate the words of others, instead of just relying on authoritative thinkers. Our interpretation is that each of the three supervision arenas is a necessary element of our model and that it is the synergy effect of these that produced the good results as well as the students' satisfaction.

### **Summary of findings and educational significance**

We have found that the supervision groups where students get experience giving feedback on and discussing fellow students' project plans, argumentation and rhetorical presentation, are particularly powerful mediating tools. We have also found that the two kinds of groups

function very differently and supplement each other. Students report on dual benefit from these groups; firstly the multifaceted feedback on their own texts, secondly they argue that giving response to peers sharpens their own ability to self-assess. Supervisors themselves agree that supervision groups secure better supervision because of the multiple perspectives and because it leaves more time for focus on text quality in individual supervisory sessions. Group sessions have enhanced students' awareness of how to utilise their individual supervision sessions. A clear finding is that progressive training in giving feedback, which is an integrated part of the learning environment from day one in this programme, is a prerequisite for the improvement of writing. Mutual commitment and willingness to engage in partnership and community building is another prerequisite. Clearly not all students or supervisors agree on the importance of this or are ready to invest the time this takes, but our interpretations of the results of this study, is that the power of the group is worth the time and effort.

Focusing on the enculturation of master students into a discourse community, we found that the more symmetrical, dialogic and multi-vocal relationships in the groups supplement the asymmetrical relationship in the supervisor-student dyad and enhance learning. Research supervision has been identified by OECD as an area in higher education in need of improvement, and this study offer one model for such improvement.

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