

Learning Environment in Supervision that Develops Students' Autonomy in Degree Projects

Marita Cronqvist, Ellinor Skaremyr

University of Borås, Sweden

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This study is a newly started project about student autonomy with focus on the learning environment that promotes and develops students' autonomy in degree projects. Research shows that academic writing in higher education needs to be developed in terms of student autonomy (Fung & Mei, 2015; Mickwitz & Suojala, 2020; van Blankenstein, Saab, van der Rijst, Danel, Bakker-van den Berg et al., 2019). Other aspects of learning such as critical thinking and motivation are closely related to students' autonomy, the studies show. Both autonomy and critical thinking are presented as desirable ideals generally in higher education, but based on research, and experiences as teacher educators, it turns out to be problematic to develop students' autonomy, not least in academic writing and in degree projects. Issues related to supervision strategies are rarely discussed and there is a presumption about how supervision is done (Eriksson & Gustavsson, 2016). As a common international issue, many students request templates and very clear guidance on how they "should" write to be approved.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to create a learning environment in supervision that develops students' autonomy in degree projects. Through the creation of the learning environment in supervision, students' autonomy is expected to develop.

The research questions are:

1. How do the teaching colleagues describe...

a) autonomy?

b) that autonomy is promoted?

c) their observation of autonomy?

2. How do the workshop and Self Determination theory contribute to the collegial consensus? 3. How do the autonomy matrix contribute to the collegial consensus?

In relation to research, it is described how autonomy can be understood in many different ways, such as the student taking initiatives, making choices, taking responsibility and arguing (Magnusson & Zackariasson, 2019). A reasonable assumption is that autonomy as a phenomenon can be expressed and promoted or counteracted in many different ways within various academic cultures, in which the teachers supervise.

Within higher education, it is expected and desired that students develop and increase their autonomy, but most students do not perceive such a development themselves (Henri, Morrell & Scott, 2018). Henri et al. argue for an education that provides several opportunities for the student to act autonomously and enhances students' self-confidence. The result points to a larger picture to understand student autonomy. For the present study, this means that questions about what is manageable to do or to develop within the degree project may arise. A useful strategy to promote autonomy through supervisors' questions appeared when Magnusson (2021) studied supervision conversations. Partly, open and submissive questions made it possible for the students to direct the supervision conversation. When students show resistance in supervision situations, it can be understood as a requirement for autonomy, Magnusson (2020) argues.

Based on the theory of autonomous and controlled motivation (Guay, Ratelle and Chanal, 2008), we can assume that students can autonomously complete a degree project if the inherent motivation is promoted through positive response, choices and contexts characterized by a supportive atmosphere. Students' opportunity for autonomy is thus dependent on the context that surrounds the supervision process, as has been shown by Guay et al. (2008). They emphasize that the context such as the teacher's commitment and structure in the teaching can support students' autonomy through the student knowing what is expected of him/her. Furthermore, within medical education Sawatsky, O'Brien and Hafferty (2022) suggest a 'hands-on' approach of supporting autonomy built on feedback and coaching in education. Thus, we understand that students' motivation and autonomy are related to the supervision context and the relation between the supervisor and the student.

Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used

The method of using workshops to develop teaching has proven effective (Swennen, Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2008) in that relatively little time is required to create awareness of and develop an important aspect of teaching/supervision. Swennen et al. (2008) believe that the teachers, after participating in the workshop, have developed their teaching but also their ability to talk about and reflect on their own teaching. They argue for teachers' need to participate in similar processes to develop as teachers: "in order to learn from the expertise of colleagues, to reflect on their own teaching and to develop as teacher educators" (Swennen et al., 2008, p. 541)

The implementation is based in a first step on arranging workshops for supervisors where they have collegial discussions about how they understand autonomy, how they can promote it, how they discover autonomy in the process and how they assess it. After the initial discussion, the supervisors are asked to complete an autonomy matrix (Magnusson & Zackariasson 2019, p. 1414; 2021, p. 52). The matrix compels the supervisors to agree on signs of autonomy and contributes to discussions about the meanings of the pre-determined concepts in the matrix. In order to include more perspectives, similar workshops with students are arranged. In subsequent steps, the project is expanded to several faculties and academies. All workshop conversations are recorded. The project is linked to theories of students' autonomous motivation for studies (Self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan, 2008).

The analysis of data is a qualitative content analysis. From data, various patterns about the understanding of autonomy are searched for. In the next step, differences and similarities are identified to see if participants are approaching some kind of coherence about autonomy.

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

The present project will provide a critical view of supervision and student autonomy. Through the project, different strategies for supervision will be made visible, discussed and problematized from different perspectives (supervisor and student perspectives), which in the long run will contribute to a more equal and legally secure supervision practice. From a test round of the workshop, teacher educators as participants expressed some ideas about what it means to be autonomous: To take the initiative, to show originality, creativity and enthusiasm, to relate to sources and context, to argue, motivate and choose, to take

responsibility, to show critical thinking and reflection to generalize and synthesize. The participants also expressed different signs of students' autonomy: When they

- Ask questions
- Ask for help
- Informs (not ask)
- Act without permission
- Express own ideas, that get the supervisor involved
- Express and discuss a clear idea

These results are preliminary, and it will be interesting to develop the understanding of autonomy and how it can be promoted within supervision in different higher education contexts.

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