

Pair Interview 3

<p>Interviewer</p>	<p>I would like to welcome and thank you for participating in today's focus group discussion as part of my Master's Thesis in the Educational Leadership programme on the matter of discussing on what it means to study in an academic environment here at JYU, a Finnish higher education institution. Well, you know my name... My name is Christine Niemi and I am a Master's degree student in the Educational Leadership programme.</p> <p>As an international student in an international programme, previous experiences of teaching and learning in different places come here together and may influence the educational setting, in which you find yourself in, positively but also negatively.</p> <p>The aim of this focus group discussion is therefore to provide you an opportunity to share your experiences and thoughts in an official space as a student here at JYU with specific focus on your engagement in academic work and academic environment.</p> <p>Your views will be used to understand the teaching and learning environment from the student perspective and eventually further develop certain content areas such as research methods courses, research seminars and individual supervision. The main aim of the research is at this stage is awareness building. By sharing the findings of this research, it is hoped that providers of international programmes can better respond to the diverse experiences and backgrounds of international participants.</p> <p>The focus group discussion should not last longer than an hour...Please note that the following session is video- and audio-recorded, an informed consent has been provided to you and you have signed it already. Ok, all clear?</p>
<p>P6</p>	<p>Yeah.</p>
<p>Interviewer</p>	<p>So, the discussion is basically divided into certain areas, we talk a bit about individual experiences, then we look into group work experiences, then support measures and then in the end recommendations, but we will see how it flows. That's how I did it with the last group as well.</p> <p>Ok, you represent a group of diverse students. You have met before, but you don't know each other's backgrounds.</p>
<p>P6</p>	<p>(Shaking head).</p>
<p>P5</p>	<p>(Shaking head)</p>
<p>Interviewer</p>	<p>So, I will share a bit, because you have filled out pre-questionnaire.</p>
<p>P6</p>	<p>Oh yeah.</p>
<p>Interviewer</p>	<p>But, it's just very short. P5 is from (home country P5) and her mother tongue is (mother tongue of home country P5). She is an Educational Leadership student, second year and P6 is (home country nationality) and she is an Educational Sciences Student, first year student. Both of you have studied in your home countries, in your respective languages, but both of you have also experiences in having certain</p>

	lectures in English and projects, if I understood right.
P6	Yep.
Interviewer	And you (addressing P6) have done an internship in (ESL environment).
P6	(Nodding)
Interviewer	... which was related to your studies, I assume.
P6	Yeah. Teaching.
Interviewer	So, that's the main background shortly. I have a couple of questions I am going to ask you first. If you can... we can see how it develops then. How do you manage your studies here at JYU? How would you describe your study experiences so far? What has gone and what has been difficult and why? And always keep in mind, we talk about academic environment and academic engagement. So, not necessarily living in Finland, but studying.
P5	I think the question contains several. What was the challenge...
Interviewer	No, how do you manage your studies, how would you describe your study experiences so far, what has gone well and what has been difficult. So, it implies challenges as well, if there are any.
P5	For me, I have started to realize that Finnish education has so much flexibility and it gives big, huge autonomy compared to my background, education surroundings. So, I know freedom is good, but then I started to realize, I faced challenges, because I do not know how to use the freedom when they give me too much autonomy. It helps me to develop what is my own interest, but on the other hand...it also gives me confusion. I have never learned in that way. In (home country P5), we are learning in a passive way, it is more easy for me to get instruction. And teachers give a navigation for us. So, we just said to follow the instruction. But then here, everything is based on 'What is our interest, what is our goal to learn.' But, I myself haven't seriously thought about what my interest is. So, it gave me a challenge. But at the same time, I started to see... this is also a way how to... it also helps me to develop my own idea. But still gives challenge 'cause I came here as Master's degree student, which I means I have to write a thesis and the thesis topic... nobody doesn't gives, but it really depends on my interest.
Interviewer	And your learning.
P5	Yeah. And it gives me a.... So, that I have to prepare to have my own motivation, my own strong interest, but it seems for me.... It is a challenge in itself finding my own interest.
Interviewer	'Cause you have never been able to that before?
P5	No.
Interviewer	Ok, what about you?
P6	Well, I think when it comes to autonomy, I can kinda relate to what you said. I think, in a less strict way because the (home country P6) is quite open as well. Though in my former university, we had a programme and that was just what we did. And there was

	<p>not really much room for choice and that's different here because there is a lot of room for choice. At the same time for me personally it does not make that big difference because I have always been looking for my own challenges and I have always been looking for different ways of doing things. So, even within the set structural guidelines, I was looking for ways to move around. And it's nice that I have more opportunity here to do that because there is the openness. But at the same time, I also feel a bit restricted because... yes, there is a lot of choice, but it has to be choice that interests you and for me, what is difficult sometimes... I mean, I looked at the programme of the study and then you look more into what the different courses are like, what they are about and we choose a specialization if you want to and then I was looking through this specialization and I was like 'Yeah, ok... I could specialize in this, but I already know a lot about this before my former university. I could this, but that's not particularly what I like. This is what interests me, but half of the courses are aiming at language teaching. I am not a language teacher.' So for me, that's not the most useful in that sense. I mean I know that everyone is a language teacher, but that's not my focus. And of course I didn't expect courses in physical education teaching here because it's not there. But it does restrict me a bit in my choices because I am interested in things, not all the things that are offered. So, making it difficult to find my way and then it's sometimes challenging because the level of the courses is very different. (P5 nodding) Some courses are really up there and really good and some courses are... there's a lot of Bachelor's students, exchange students in there as well. I am not saying that's the reason that the level is different. But I think it has something to do with it. Yeah. So, again I am always looking for challenges and challenge myself, but it's not always easy to get there. Yeah... but at the same time, it's nice to have the options and have the choices.</p>
Interviewer	So, you have referred both a bit like to this academic freedom, flexibility...
P6	Yeah.
Interviewer	What about language 'cause you both have actually completed your previous studies in your native tongue. You (P6) have submitted a thesis at the end, but you (P5) haven't. So, do you think this has influenced your academic working life here because did it help you, did it prepare you?
P6	Not per se because my thesis... the process didn't really go so well because I... what we had to do in my university was practical research. So, not very academic but very practical. We had to implement something and do something with it. And because I did my final internship in (ESL environment), I had to prepare something in the (home country P6), but I didn't know what my situation would be here. So, when I came here, I had to adjust to the environment, had to change everything, had to do the research. And I really didn't care about the research at that moment. So, in then end, it wasn't really a great product. So, I am not really happy about it. But then again, I did do it in English and I've done a lot of other projects and stuff in English.
Interviewer	So, your thesis was in English?
P6	Yeah, because I wanted my supervisor here to be able to read it as well, if he wanted to. Because... well, (mother tongue), he could have tried. It was a (ESL environment) school, but it's difficult. So, yeah the language is not a big issue for me, but I wouldn't say I am very confident with the research methods and things yet. Even though I have done sort of a thesis before.
Interviewer	Ok. What about you P5. You haven't done a thesis. So, were you prepared coming here?

P5	Not at all. So, one of the things that I used to talk with my (home country environment) friends. They gonna have a single idea (?) of.. My friend who took the academic English course together, she also had faced challenges if I know 'cause writing a thesis it's already have fixed form, you gotta follow it and regulation. And without having experience of writing thesis and we are instructed in English, which is not my mother tongue. So, it was a double challenge for me. If I remember... when I first came here, although I may have... my major is English literature and linguistics, but here... not just listening the lecture, but to understand the lecture talks about different major... it was... in the beginning for me watching the teacher...
Interviewer	Not understanding necessarily.
P5	Yes. It felt like I am sitting there and being there and watching the lecture. I was understanding... I was able to understand, but not completely acquiring really knowledge.
P6	The combination of the contents, the language (P5: Yes.) and also the different accents of the teachers and the teaching styles that's going around.
P5	And this was difficult because studying a Master's degree requires us to not just listening, but understanding and I have to know.. I have to know how to express my own idea according to that... but since the very basic things is not... how should I say, prepared in my perspective. So, it took me quite a long time process to...
Interviewer	... adjust to that.
P5	Yeah. For now I am ok. I am ok reading articles, but I would say it still takes time to digest. Not just reading, but really comprehending.
Interviewer	Ok. I will give you a paper now, I will read it out as well, but so you have it there. So, often as a course here at JYU, it is part to write an essay in an academic format.. At least in our programme, this is referred to academic writing. Additionally, the so-called final project is to conduct a small-scale research and write a master's thesis... That we have addressed already shortly... which is supervised by professors and senior lecturers. The thesis topics are related to the research areas of the faculty of education. The thesis process is supported by research method courses, research seminars and individual supervision. So, when it comes to your individual experiences... this can be an assignment, but maybe also thesis experiences here.. But I think you are in different stages I think. Can you think of an assignment, you were pleased with and why and an assignment, you were disappointed with. So. this is all individual work still, not group work yet.
P5	So, it only talks about individual work?
Interviewer	Yeah. We come to group work next, which has very similar questions.
P6	I think, it's for me at least... it's very related to the course itself. If the course itself was something that's caught my attention and kept my attention, then the task related to it is more interesting to do as well because then I feel inspired and actually do something with it. So, there was some of those courses that were really nice and interesting and then the final task was very open. Basically, just... ok, what have you gained from this, what have you learned and then explaining it with, related to a certain context whether it's your context or different one. And again, I really like the fact that I can play around with it, that I don't have to do it in certain way and find my own way. And it doesn't have to be very highly academic for me, it can be just a nice

	text to read. I like to produce something like that. But at the same time, there is also courses that... where during the course I couldn't really see the point of it. So, I didn't really know where it was going and then there was some assignments here and there. I felt like... 'Ok. So, what I am doing?'. (P5 nodding)
Interviewer	So, lack of communicating expectations towards what's the outcome?
P6	Yeah, a bit. But also that... sometimes the lecturer just didn't seem sure of what they wanted with it. And... It's not always easy to work with. I mean... again, it's related to the freedom 'cause they .. the lecturers want to give you as a student a lot of freedom, what you want to do, how you want to do it. But sometimes they go too far in it and then it makes them seem very insecure and then I feel like 'Well, you are still the.. You are supposed to be the professor, you are supposed to be the teacher. And I understand that you want to.. You know be flexible and give us some input, but at some point you have to make a choice, what are we gonna do, be clear on that.' Because you can see in the rest of the class, that there a lot of people that don't understand, don't have a clue where this is going.
Interviewer	So, like structural...
P6	Yeah, it's not always easy to digest what exactly they mean if they don't seem certain themselves about what they want.
Interviewer	What do you think?
P5	I do agree with if the lecture... the name itself sounds cool and meaningful, but actually we are going to the lecture sometimes, it could be different. Since.. You know we are studying Educational Leadership. I do not have any background knowledge of education itself, but what we are learning about school context in the perspective of principals. So, I have never been in the place yet and I don't even have background of the school, but it kinda gave me a blank idea. <i>I feel like I am stepping on .. the air.</i>
P6	That's a difficult thing with especially the compulsory courses that because there is participants in the programme from all different backgrounds, some from psychology, some from English, some from educational backgrounds, but you all have to take the compulsory courses and for a certain group that will be a of repetition of what they've already had and what they already know and for another group, it will be completely new and they will just put right into it. And then there is, what I experienced this year, is that there are some courses that have a lot of overlap. Like... we discuss in one course almost exactly the same as we discuss in another course and maybe even a third course. And we've talked about that with the programme coordinator as well, but it's... yeah, you expect more.
Interviewer	Ok, as a student?
P6	You hope more. Yeah. because if you've.. As a student have this course and that course and it's almost exactly the same, you are not gonna pay attention. And it's very difficult to motivate yourself to keep going there and actually do the work that you have to do.
Interviewer	Do you have similar experiences? Because you said, you have no education background, I think in our programme that's quite often the case.
P5	I think kinda... Yeah, I do agree 'cause some of the courses.. They still have overlapping content. For example... but then the overlap. Sometimes it helped me to

	apply these things into other classes.
P6	If it connects to the things then it's good.
P5	Yes, yes.
P6	But if it's a direct overlap, it's a difference.
P5	Yes.
P6	But I understand what you say.
P5	In that term, sometimes it could help me to develop previous this course idea, develop through another type of courses. But I still understand that there is overlapping and what I wanted to see is more practical, not about 'This is our theory, so.. mission, vision..' What I wanted to see ... so how have it really work in practical example. I wanted to listen real principal comments and listen about what is really their challenges. Because for me... Once, I remember.. Once my friend told me, when she writes an assignment, she told me like 'For me it sounds like preaching. We should do this, like a principal we should do this or we should do like this and this kinda inbetween..' When I am writing an assignment, I feel like I am preaching, instructing it's gonna be this way. I kinda feel like similar.
P6	It will be interesting to see how they develop it now because a lot of these things we've also said in meetings with the supervisors, the coordinators. And they have the new curriculum next year of course. So, it's interesting to see what they did with it. Did they make some changes.
Interviewer	Do you know if they will inform you or how...
P6	We've already been informed about the new curriculum. We got an email, but that does not say that much of course, it's only the title of the courses. So, we don't really know what exactly it is. (P5 nodding) But it will effect us a little bit depending on how much you've done this year. If you haven't done that much, then you have to do a lot with the new curriculum next year, I guess.
Interviewer	Ok, now we go to similar question for working in groups. I don't know how your experiences have been before with group work back home, but in here I think you have realized there is quite a lot of group work within courses. So, we are looking now into the aspects of working as a group in an academic context here at JYU. How do you approach group work assignments and then again, can you give an example you were pleased with and one assignment you were disappointed with and why.
	(Pause and laughter)
Interviewer	Don't worry.
P5	This reminds me of one of my friends. She told me 'I think when we do group work, everybody brings their own culture, not only about their personal character, but also about their country background since we are in an international setting.'
Interviewer	So you think the same? 'Cause you said that was your friend.
P5	Not about the friend. But I also feel. And I could see according to their culture, the working style could be different in proceed. I could see.. And the way how the

	<p>communicate goes on, it also different from me. Like if there are native speaker there and the communication flow style it seems, but if there are no native speaker students and it also gives... it could... there could be a misunderstanding between the language. Although they intend something other, something else, but then they start to catch the idea. I think culture was a bit challenge, yes. To be honest, since... maybe because I am ('Cultural' background P5) so, when I work with ('Cultural' background P5), I feel a little bit more comfortable because I have been grown up there and I know... just because I know their culture and their characteristics. <i>But then when I am ... students working, from native speaker or from Western culture, then I started to feel kinda a bit overwhelmed.</i> (laughing, P6 slightly nodding) Not because of them, but just because of language and the way how they talk, more directive (P6 slightly nodding). Anyway, it worked out in both way to do a group project and I still learn something in both way. But I noticed myself, I became different. But this is just my personal idea.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But if you would describe an assignment where you were kinda happy with. I don't know how your experiences are, if you had any like group works where you were disappointed with the outcome. Was there anything like that?</p>
P5	<p>Miscommunication was difficult for me, in a group project. Miscommunication and when I felt like I am quite overburdened and then it was difficult.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Overburdened by language or other factors as well?</p>
P5	<p>Without communication, but when it's just distributed the workload, then it was difficult for me because we have gathered together to do the work, but at the same time I also like to have a.. just flow ideas, comes and goes. But then without ideas flows, just separate the workload and do the thing and then merge in the end, it was difficult for me.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Ok. What about P6?</p>
P6	<p>(Smiling) It's a nice challenge.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Yeah, you said you liked challenges, so...</p>
P6	<p>I know. (laughing) but it's a.. I found it , it's always a challenge working in a group. Doesn't matter if it's with people from the same background, cultural backgrounds or with international background 'cause I have worked with a lot of groups in the (home country P6) as well and it wasn't always that easy (P5 nodding) because you have a lot of different personalities in there, you have people that do a lot, you have people that don't a lot, you have people that are perfectionists, there are people that slack off and don't really do anything, you have people that are somewhere in the middle, people that speak up, people that don't say anything and that's here as well... (laughing because the lights went off) Sitting too still.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Ok, didn't have that in the last one.</p>
P6	<p>We've been sitting too still.</p> <p>And here.. Well, there is a little extra dimension with the international background, but the differences are more or less the same. And that's not always easy. At the same it's a big resource to have all these different backgrounds (P5 nodding) because it's really interesting to be able to compare the different backgrounds and to use the experiences that people have in the projects that you are doing. But.. yeah, it's not an</p>

	<p>easy process especially not because you are working with those different personalities and I know myself, I am very aware of my position in a group, I am aware of how I can be and that awareness helps me to keep myself in check a bit 'cause I know I can. Especially if it is something that I am interested in, I can form the reins and say 'Ok, we should do this and this and this.' But I am also very aware of the fact that I shouldn't because you are working in a group, you work together. But then it is difficult if you have other people that are the same, but don't have sort of awareness to keep themselves back. Yeah, it's interesting and for me, I like to be sort of a mediator in a group. So, I like to.. I am somewhere from the gray areas, I don't like making decisions. So, usually I don't care if it's left or right, we all get there in the middle somewhere. So, I always like to at least try and help everyone get their voice out in a group, also the more quiet people and especially when the conversation keeps going around and around and eventually we say 'Ok, so this is what we are saying. Let's just continue.' But again, it depends on the group if they react well to it or not. (P5 nodding) And we had some projects where the group worked together very well because you have a bit similar persons in the group and they work in the same spirit. You think 'Ok, let's do this, chop, chop, let's go.' But then you have also groups and works where these people are not doing anything, these people are doing a lot and even though they like doing a lot, there is some annoyance in there anyway because other people not doing anything. So, yeah it's an interesting dynamics that's in there.</p>
Interviewer	<p>In the previous group, they have discussed a bit the different kind of levels of skills when it comes to writing for example (P5: Ahhh.) Have you experienced there any good signs, bad signs like what were the challenges? In the last group they were discussing for example that they had cases of plagiarism and how they dealt with it. Have you ever had that experience or did you notice anything?</p>
P6	<p>Not per se plagiarism, but that the writing styles are very different and... yeah, it also depends on how big the group is. We've had to write an essay with eight people.</p>
P5	<p>(astonished laughing)</p>
P6	<p>That's not funny. That's not funny. If everyone writes a little piece and then you have to merge it into one big thing. So, if you are working with two or three, maybe four (P5 nodding), that's challenging enough. And it also depends if you have to write an essay or if you have to make a presentation, because then still the challenges remain because everyone presents in a different way or everyone writes in a different way (P5 nodding). But it's also.. It's quite funny to see in this group that we have now that quite quickly the same people start looking for the same people when they have a group project. So, we have this group of more or less native English speakers with some additions to it that are usually clustering together and then we have a group here that's clustering together and a little group there. So, even though in some cases there will be some mix of, most of the time it is the same people looking for the same people to work together with. And even though that's a very safe environment (P5 slightly nodding), there is always people that stand out and stay behind. I don't really like to see that. But yeah.. As I said, it can make it easier to work together as a group because you know what you can expect from the other person. Especially if you get to know each other better.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But then sometimes, you cannot choose in some groups.</p>
P6	<p>Yeah.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And you actually mentioned Bachelor's students (P6: Yeah, that's true), there is a mix</p>

	of exchange students are usually Bachelor's students. Have you experienced there any like.. Because I assume that there are differences in how they approach an assignment in a certain context.
P6	Yeah, definitely. But again, it also depends on the assignment. We had to, we had to organize a day of workshops for a school class and there was this two Master's and two Bachelor's students from four completely different backgrounds and yes, we as Master's students were both teachers, so we've had some more experience in teaching, but the other two.. They had some experience with other things. They could bring in their own culture as well and so, we could sort of learn from each other.
Interviewer	It's what you make out of it.
P6	Yeah, and as I said before as well... I mean, at least for me, working in a group like that for me it is a really good opportunity to learn to keep myself back and to give other people room to go up there. And that's most of the times, when you think of learning experience in a group, you want to sort off get better yourself, but sometimes you get better yourself by getting yourself from..
Interviewer	... a bit more space (?).
P6	Yeah.
Interviewer	What about you P5? When you think about the different kind of skill sets you have experienced possibly in group work.
P5	I think in a group, I also... I think I had a help a lot (laughed) 'cause catching the class was not easy for me and if I do personal assignment, it took me a long time. Now I see I am kinda slow pace. I need time and I work really slowly. But when I am in a group work, it always complete in a right time. (laughing)
Interviewer	Peer support in that sense.
P5	Yeah, and that helped me and to help me to focus on the topic of what we were doing in the assignment and I you also have.... If there is a native speaker and no native speaker in a group, when there is a native speaker, it was easy to ask proofreading and I could see the writing process. It worked out quite quicker. Maybe because they can express whatever they want, but for me... for the students who are non-native speakers... this is just my personal idea, but their expression spectrum could be limited. (P6 looking doubtful/thinking?) Although they want to express whatever they want in their mother tongue, but then... I think sometimes, I have two brains. It takes me time.. Ok, I have to go think and then it comes back in another language. And still have to write the assignment.
P6	I understand that, but at the same time I think being a non-native speaker can help you as well being more critical towards things.
P5	Yeah, yeah.. In that sense.
P6	So, for a native speaker it's sometimes easier to do things, but they don't think about what they are doing or how they are doing it (P5 noise of understanding, 'aha-moment?') and being a native speaker doesn't mean that you are a good writer (P5 nodding). I mean, you might have an advantage with the language. It doesn't mean that you know more about writing styles (P5 'Ahh') or even grammar. I think the fact, that you have learned the language...

	(interruption from outside) 00:36:40 - 00:37:24 (continued actually until 00:37:41, but P5 started speaking earlier again)
P5	Anyway... I think group worked helped me like...
Interviewer	.. to develop further...
P5	Hm (yes). I think so, yeah. Although the previous answer that was a bit challenging according to the culture in the group, but I think it helped anyway.
Interviewer	Ok, then we take a look into the existing support here at the university for writing, reading academically. So, there is this quote I have.. 'Ideally, academic support should be constructed around your needs', the needs of the student. And we have addressed this already a bit, the needs of the student. To what extent have you been supported for your academic work here at JYU, are you satisfied with the support you have gotten or received.. Yes, no, why? So, a little discussion about that. (P6 smiling) What kind of support have you received, maybe we start like that.
P6	Bit for academic writing... ?
Interviewer	Yeah. I think specifically for the topic of academic integrity like because in your thesis for example you have to do research... so, in a way there are expectations around that, how has this been supported or explained to you.
P6	Well, I mean.. I think it is quite extensive what we've had in both directions. And I think, we've had academic writing courses (P5 slightly nodding) quite a lot with a lot of information and then the research seminars, things about qualitative and quantitative research (P5 slightly nodding). But it's not really tailored to the student's needs. It is quite extensive.. So for people who don't really know anything about it, it could be nice, especially if you want to go in that direction. <i>Me for example, I really don't care about quantitative research. So, why I have to go through all of that?</i> I forget everything anyway. So, it's... I mean, I understand why we do it, but it's not the most useful thing because I don't remember anything of it. And also with the academic writing course... I have done a lot of writing in my secondary school, in high school, university level wasn't that high, but I've done a lot of writing and then for me it doesn't matter if that's in (mother tongue P6) or in English because the style is the same... writing style, how to build a text, how to construct it, it's basically the same, just the language is different.
Interviewer	So, your background has actually helped you quite a bit.
P6	Yes. So, for me those lessons were like yeah.. I was just sitting there and 'ok, it's nice that I can now put a sticker on this thing what I've been doing. Oh, I know the name of it.', but it didn't really help me anything. At the same time, there were a lot of people that it really did help. So, it would be nice if there is more differentiation in that and also in the research seminars and in the other classes. Because, there is a group of people that has a lot of background in quantitative research methods for example. So, they have to attend the course and there... it's useless because they already know all those things and they have done research in that area. Whereas there is a group of people that have no idea what the lecturer is talking about because they have never seen it before. So, there is an unbalance there, in both... the writing classes and the research classes. And at the same time, I can understand because it is not easy to tailor that to the students' needs. I mean, it's difficult because of all the different backgrounds to sort off estimate who can skip the class and who can't and how you gonna measure that, how you gonna make sure that they are eventually doing it in a

	way that JYU expects them to do it. So, I can understand that for that reason everyone has to attend it. But again, if you want to be, helping your students where they need it, would be nice to see if there's other possibilities.
Interviewer	What about you P5? You have also had similar courses I think like the academic reading and writing and the research courses. What have you gained from those or what is your opinion on those because now P6 has talked a bit about her, but you are in a different programme.
P5	I think taking taking a lecture is helpful anyway just doing my own... like just doing, trying to do my... by myself. But then, get my a question... like 'Did it work out practically? Have I really gained something?' Like she said (pointing to P6)... she talks about quantitative research. To be honest, it's same for me. Although I have completed my assignment, I wonder how much I do remember. Like, the reason what we are, why we are learning is for really actually to use it. But, although we gained the grade in the end and although we made our assignment, but if I see for previous two years, what I have really gained practically, I am quite curious.
Interviewer	That's actually the next question, maybe we can reflect on that. In what ways do you think you have developed as a student academically throughout your experiences here? 'Cause you have two years, almost. You have one year. So, because you both said what is the practical sight of those courses, how much I have gained and what did I learn. So, do you think you have developed further in a way like have you... like your writing skills. You said your writing skills are similar to the one you have had back home. What about you P5?
P5	I think.. For sure. Practically what I have changed. If I put it as a "practical", then the way how I see education has changed. What I mean is.. In (home country P5), in ('cultural background' P5) countries, it's quite demanding and there is already a certain structured way. We have to put it, we have to reach those standard and gotta be this way, this way. But here, I see many people perceive education 'do what you want' like 'follows what you are interesting part is'. But I thought in (home country P5), there are certain types of things that is already... oh, I'd wish I could express i quite well... (thinking pause). Yeah, I will put it this way. I don't think I have never considered studying is... I am doing, I do study for myself.
Interviewer	Like now?
P5	Yeah. But now, I think my perspective has been changed. I am doing this because I want this and I want to know this and I want to know this. But in the previous, when I was studying in (home country P5), I need to do this because this requires me to do this. This kinda... this requires me to do it. Although I do not certainly wanna do it, but the society needs and people's expectation and parents' expectation. I think in ('cultural background P5) countries, it is quite challenging to go away from their expectation from parents or... but here, nobody gives me a high expectation. It is really up to me.
Interviewer	So, basically that's like a learning curve for you here that you can choose what you are interested in (P5 nodding) and how you want to approach what you are interested in.
P5	So, if it could also be practical development for me. I would say, the way I how I perceive approaching to education, it changed.
Interviewer	What about you?

P6	<p>Yeah, I think in a bit similar way. I think if we try to talk strictly about academic development. Yeah I've learned some more about research of course because that's basically what we do here. It still does not interest me that much. I am not gonna be a researcher, not in the official strict sense of the word. But it is nice to know a bit more about that background. But I think, the most development I gain here was using that international atmosphere (P5 nodding) and creating, getting more awareness and hopefully understanding of how it actually goes in other countries (P5 nodding) because, I mean, I've studied in the (home country P6) for a long time, I've done international programmes, but mostly with European students and European teachers. And of course you read and hear a lot about education in other countries, but it does not mean it is exactly like that. And now having the insight information from people that actually have been there.. Yeah, it creates a different kind of awareness. For me, in these past months, it's mostly been raising more and more questions about education. I don't have any answers anymore, I don't have any certainties at the moment about what I think education should be, how I think education should be. I am just questioning everything. I kinda like that. Especially because there so many things that you now see and understand that makes you think 'Why on earth are we doing that?'</p>
Interviewer	<p>Do you have the chance to discuss those questions?</p>
P6	<p>In some courses, yes. And there is some people that I can really discuss that with. Not everyone reacts that well to it because even after these couple of months, there are some students that have still quite straight mind-set (P5 nodding). This is it and this is how should be. And that's ok. I don't try to convince them otherwise. I just like to hear their opinion about things. As I said, I don't know where I stand at the moment. So, I don't have any judgement about where other people stand. So, I think that's one of the greatest things that I've gained here and the inspiration to go out there even more and to see for myself what it's like. To go and taste the international education.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Ok, I have a question which is related to basically recommendations. There was one thing you mentioned in the beginning, both of you, the overlap of content and I am not sure if you have any idea on how to maybe improve that or make.. Like how to utilize this because you said you utilize it by taking one batch from course to another and that's how you carry on, but you mentioned a bit different way that it's not so beneficial for you when you realize that there is overlap and you get quite unmotivated.</p>
P6	<p>(can't understand.. Something information?) Well, I think... the most important part there, for the teachers to actually look into the programme and especially if you have compulsory courses that everyone has to do and you have optional courses, then make sure that those optional courses actually add something to what you already do in the compulsory ones (P5 slightly nodding) and that they are not the same. So, for example if you are talking about... one thing we had was 'Special and Inclusive Education', one course was almost the same as the other and if you have basic information about that in a compulsory course, then you specify it into a certain area in an optional course. Then it could be... then it adds to what you already know and build upon that. And then it also has to... it would be nice if that's in that order. So not that you get the specialization first and then the compulsory one. But that's not really up to the teachers, that's more up to the students. But just that the lecturers and teachers are aware of what is in the programme and what's being done and what they can do to have a different view of it. (P5 slightly nodding) Not sure if that's possible, but that would be nice I think. I don't know what you think (addressing P5).</p>
P5	<p>I think overlaps could be a bit... unavoidable because in Education Leadership department, if I remember right, the mandatory courses are quite the same lecturers</p>

	are holding it. It's T4... not about optional courses, but mandatory courses are quite... T6 and from T4 and two or three lecturers from the same person. So, I just thought that since there are the same lecturer and they are with the knowledge that they have, it's quite unavoidable to have the overlaps.
P6	But then again, it can be build up on something. Because, especially if it the same teacher, then they can make a programme... 'ok, in the first course, we do this and then we continue with that and continue with that.' (P5 slightly nodding). They don't have to do exactly the same in both courses.
P5	Yeah, yeah.. Oh, how I have perceived this, although it's done by the same lecturer, but since the focus was different. Although the same knowledge, but then according to the focus for example, according to the lecture title educational change or global educational view... so the topic, I think it was different, but still the root is quite... still shared similarity because of the same lecturer. For me (smiling), I always had a challenge to comprehend one lecture itself (laughing) because of my capability to understand it, but the bare understanding if I go this lecture, it tells me to develop to me. <i>But I also do understand what you are trying to say cause if it is too overlap, it could be inefficient (P6 nodding), spending same time for the students. I see what your point is.</i>
Interviewer	When we look a bit more into the academic like provision, skills in courses. Do you think there is any chance of improving or making recommendations or because you (addressing P6) have mentioned that for example you were not interested in quantitative research. What is the necessity behind going to that course. The basics you said are good to know. How detailed does it need to be? Would you have any suggestions on that, like what could be the possibilities. That's just theoretical thinking
P6	It's a difficult one because.. Yeah, as you summarized as well, I can see the value of it and I think for a lot of people, they can say at first that they are not interested in that, but if they eventually do something with it anyway, it's good to know. Sometimes you only discover when you are doing it.. 'Ok, this is not too bad.' So, yeah.. That's the difficult thing. I think especially with a course like that maybe it's... maybe it is good to have different levels, maybe have a sort of basic level (P5 nodding) that just gives you the understanding of, especially when you read a paper that has a certain way of doing research, it could understand what it is saying. Then maybe have a sort of intermediate level that goes a bit deeper, how to do it yourself. And maybe, I don't know if that's possible, but even have an expert level for the people that already have the background and what we did in our course that those people actually helped the rest of the class with some unofficial extra lessons to help them understand because they didn't really understand it after the lessons that were offered by the university. It wasn't clear enough. So, they helped. They offered some time in having some extra sessions for us sharing their knowledge and making it more clear
Interviewer	Basically the students reacted upon the students' needs.
P6	Yeah. And maybe that's, I don't know if that's too extensive or whatever, but just have a basic understanding level and then a level if you really want to continue with it and if you offer them in two different semesters for example, you can still choose later to do it and continue with it. And this is something that they might even be able to organize with a bigger group, not just for Educational Sciences or Educational Leadership because it is basically the same thing. Ok, maybe it is more focused on educational research but the research methods, especially when you talk about quantitative will not be very different in any other field.

Interviewer	Yeah, the interpretation might be different.
P6	Yeah. And you can do this with Finnish students together as well maybe because they will have to read a lot of English articles, too. So, maybe there is possibilities in that to make it more manageable if you just include a bigger group, to reach out for a bigger group without making the classroom of 100 people.
Interviewer	Ok, sounds like an interesting approach. What do you think P5? Because you said, I think one of the issues is to first grabbing the idea of what is communicated during the courses. So when you think about that, would you make any recommendations for students which maybe have similar experiences than you?
P5	Just... when I think back, the challenges that I have been through. I kinda wish that there would be language tutor that anytime I go there and ask the person to proofreading so that I could just help, get help easily. But that was one of the wishes that I wanted to have. And also for academic writing. I see there is still different for the people who have already written thesis and for the people like me who have not written a thesis at all. Although we are taking the same lecture, but the way how the level of our understanding could be variated, I think. So, I also had felt the need if I could go anytime and if I could get help from the lecturer.
P6	But I think it is something that should come from an individual call because I also know there are some courses offered in our programme for students who don't have an educational background per se but for some people, they may not have a formal educational background, but maybe a more informal. So, those courses are not really adding anything to what they already know. For some people that have formal education background, they might be very useful. So, they make some courses compulsory for people that don't need them, even though their records maybe states, they apparently do. Whereas others that could actually use these courses, they are not compulsory to...
Interviewer	Oh, yeah.. Those were the two, they were two courses.
P6	Yes, and I heard from a lot of students that there was some, you know some found it very useful and some found it not useful at all. It depends on the background. And again, I can understand that from the university's perspective, this is the only way they can sort of try to measure and yeah, because you have this background, you don't have this background, so you need this. But that doesn't mean you actually do. So, yeah trying to maybe get more into, with questionnaires or discussion or a personal study plan discussion or something, what you need.
Interviewer	What do you really need as a student.
P6	And then, if you can know more a bit about the course in advance. OK, this course is going to be about this (P5 nodding), and then you can decide if you have some experience in that or not. Maybe.
Interviewer	Anything to add?
P5	(laughing) I am listening, so I forgot what I was going to say...
P6	Sorry.
P5	No, no. Ah! I am not sure if it is necessary with your research, but... another challenge I have faced a lot was, we are learning educational leadership, but if we see our

	instructions, it is also related to organization, non-governmental organization, which is related to education. That was explanation. But what I have most seen here in, through the lecture, kinda put myself into really educational leadership principal role. So, that was for me...
Interviewer	Like a lack of perspective. Always the principal role.
P5	Yeah. So for me, I have more idea in out of this part 'principal thing'. But still related to education. But through the lecture, the lecturer has been a principal (laughing), so.. Because educational leadership in English for me sounds more.. Had more broad way of perspective. But I know in Finnish, it's "Rehtori instituutti". So, in Finnish (laughing)...
Interviewer	Rector institute.
P5	Yes. yes. (P6 nodding) So, there was disconnection for me.
Interviewer	Yeah, that's interesting. We are getting to the end. So, basically I have.. Well, two, three more questions. What did you feel was the most important thing we talked today about and if you have anything, you would like to add or was missing. You (addressing P5) added already something about the disconnection, but is there anything else you would like to add?
P5	So, I just wanted to remind.. So, the theme of this research is ... what? (laughing)
Interviewer	(laughing) My research?
P6	Academic experience.
Interviewer	Yeah, academic experiences of students in an international programme. So, there might be also Finnish students.  So, we talked now a lot about academic skills, what is missing, what is here, what could be improved, what is good, what is maybe not so helpful. We talked a lot about the programme itself, I think.
P6	Yeah, I don't know. I feel sometimes that there are some choices that should be made a bit more clearly. Like, do we want to focus on the open atmosphere of Finnish education where everything is possible or do we want these specific academic skills, do we want to cater to students' needs or do we want them to do these things. Or do we find a way in the middle somewhere. But, it's drifting a bit and it's also... within the programme there is huge differences. And then even more when you look outside the programme to different international Master's programmes. So, I don't really know if there is anything that should be done about that or if there is anything that can be done about that. I don't know.
Interviewer	You mean like because this is very much catered to Finnish society maybe? The whole approach?
P6	Yeah, and I mean I like that fact that there a differences, but I can also see that it is not always easy for different students. I feel personally that I can handle the difference, I can handle the fact that this teacher expects us to do something in this way and that teacher expects us to do something this way and this one gives a lot of guidelines and the other one gives us just a title and that's it. I can handle that and I like that. But I also see that there is people struggling with the fact that there is this

	difference between the courses.
P5	Just to sum up, freedom is good (laughing). That's also one of the things I learned while studying in Finnish institution. This is only about me, not like whole ('cultural background P5) students. Just about me. Taking the freedom without being prepared to how to use it, it's like chaos (laughing). Could be. Although freedom itself is a good thing. But it's like three inventors and let them hold, let them use anything, but it could be dangerous like knife or anything. Just to describe.
Interviewer	So, it causes a bit confusion in the beginning maybe.
P5	Yeah, yeah, yeah. That is the right... confusion. Yes, yes (laughing).
Interviewer	There is a term for this and it's called "academic shock"...
P5	Yes, yes.
Interviewer	... which the students sometimes go through. One last question, which was asked by the first group I had and they would like to add this. I know you are in different stages of your thesis writing, but their question was: Are you finishing your thesis in time? In time means after officially two years. Do you think you will finish in time because you are first-year student.
P6	I plan to finish it by Christmas.
Interviewer	That's earlier than in time.
P6	So, after a year and a half. Yes.
P5	(astonished sounds)
P6	But I am not sure if I will make it, but that's the idea now because I want to do an internship in Spring. I don't know. I don't want to drag this with me.
Interviewer	What about you (addressing P5)?
P5	If the in-time describes Summer (laughing), seems...
Interviewer	Possible maybe, or what do you think?
P5	I would say, I would need more time to really complete it.
Interviewer	Ok.
P5	Including September or October.
Interviewer	Ok, thank you.