

Pair Interview 7

<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 this Educational Leadership programme on the matter of discussing on what it means to study in an academic environment in a Finnish higher education institution - which in this case is the University of Jyväskylä. 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 and negatively.</p> <p>The aim of this focus group discussion is therefore to provide an opportunity for you 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 the 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 at this point 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>So, this should not last longer than an hour. So, we should be ready by 11. I had focus groups, which were a bit less and some a bit more. So, let's see, but usually around an hour.</p> <p>The session is audio-and video-recorded, you have signed the consent paper and then we start.</p> <p>So, as you present part of this diverse group, I have gathered a little bit of information beforehand to fill out this survey. So, I give you a short summary of this. So, P13 is (nationality P13), (nationality P13), your native tongue is English and you are a second year Educational Sciences student (P13: Yes.). You have done a Bachelor's, finished a Bachelor's programme with submission of a thesis.</p>
<p>P13</p>	<p>I kind of. There wasn't a thesis overarching, but there was a capicum class, which was like research-based and so, it was only a one semester completion of this, but it wasn't like a Master's, where I do the research staff my entire Bachelor's, but it was a research-based paper, twenty-somewhat pages long. So, similar to a full thesis.</p>
<p>Interviewer</p>	<p>Ok, let's see. What else is really important. The study group within this programme was mainly (nationality of P13).</p>
<p>P13</p>	<p>In this programme? Yeah, completely, 100 per cent (nationality of P13).</p>

Interviewer	Ok. And then we have P14, who is (nationality P14) and your native tongue is also English. You are a first year Educational Leadership student and you have done a Bachelor's programme also without submission of a thesis. And then your degree programme was in English and the students were mainly from (home country P14).
P14	Yep.
Interviewer	Ok. And then you said, oh you said, yeah a few international students from (lists three other countries).
P14	Yeah.
Interviewer	So, first we look into kind of general questions and they are: how do you manage your studies here at JYU? How would you describe your study experiences so far? What has gone well and what has been difficult, and why? Just a bit of discussion regarding that. I can questions also if necessary.
P13	Would you like to go first or would you like me to?
P14	Well, I can start. This is the first time, I am doing like an academic research kind of course and previously because my Bachelor's is actually in (name of previous degree), so I've always been a Mathematics and Science person all the way and studying has been easier for me, everything is quite straight forward, but coming here is my first time having to write essays, doing all the assignments and it has been, because I am quite a last minute person (laughing). So, I always underestimate the time I need to actually write an essay or do my reflections. So, it stresses me out a bit when I feel like I need to get stuff done, but because when you have to write an essay, it's not like you can just get it done in two hours. It is a long process and I feel like, it makes me feel unproductive, when I am just reading articles and not producing actual work (P13 nodding). So, it's different for me because, just because I have not done such related studies before. Yeah, so that's regarding writing essays (slightly laughing)
P13	Ok. Ähm, myself had almost the opposite experience. I used to be like you, very last minute, I'll do it, deadline is Monday morning, I do it Sunday night at 10pm, but then this kind of bit me in the butt a few times during my undergrad. So, I worked at getting things done way ahead of time and then now I try to do things as soon as I can because I know I either forget about it or at the very least I turn it in and then I can correct something or I can just sit back and laugh while everyone else is struggling to work on their paper, I can just kinda like 'Haha, sucks to be you.' and drink my coffee.
P14	(Smiling) That's true.
P13	But... Yeah, I have also had the opposite, I am fairly science-focused as well, even though I did my degree in a humanities subject, but throwing off an essay in two hours isn't that big of a deal, especially if it's only just something like eight pages. And for me I could say "Oh yeah, it's only eight pages.", whereas people who are not used to writing like that (P14: Yeah.) even four pages is a big difficulty. But in my Bachelor's, it's all social studies. So, you write a history essay, you write a political science essay

	and everything is just essays and arguing back and forth with no real kind of definite answers like you would have in Science or Accounting or Math.
P14	Yeah.
P13	So, it's kind of easy for me to use a phrase, to fudge it, to kind of BS things a bit (P14 slightly laughing) and to say in two pages, what you could really just say in a paragraph.
P14	Yeah, I think that's a hard part for me because I usually don't express my views a lot, especially in written form. So, having to put my reflections and writing things out in an essay was difficult. Like I find myself, like I don't like to elaborate on things. So, I write things very straight forwardly and in the end my essay would be quite short (slightly laughing) and I would have to find ways to try to expand on my arguments and etc., etc. Yeah.
P13	Yeah, I do hate the reflective format because they never, reflection here apparently is different than what we term reflection in (home country P13) because they ask for a reflective essay and I reflect over the class and they say 'This is not what I wanted.', but they didn't give any sort of instructions about what they do want (P14 slightly nodding). They say 'Oh, it's up to you.' And then you write something and they say, this is not what they wanted, but they don't tell you what they want.
Interviewer	Like here?
P13	Here, like all the time. I found it very frustrating. And on occasion, I get threes and fours on something, which should gotten fours and fives, but they didn't tell me what they wanted, so I didn't know what they want and I wrote what I thought would be appropriate, but apparently it wasn't.
Interviewer	So, do you think it's like the expectations, which are not communicated towards you and then the feedback is not communicating as well (P13 nodding) the expectations.
P13	Yeah, definitely communicating to me 'cause I have asked quite a few professors 'What do you want from this?' and he said 'Write a reflective essay.' 'But what do you want? What should I cover?' and they tell me 'It's up to.' And then I write something and then it's not what they wanted. Up to to me and then... So, I had that quote a few times.
Interviewer	Since both of your native tongues are English, do you think language had any influence here at all for you? Was it helpful maybe that you actually had this like (P13 nodding) background of being grown up in an English speaking environment.
P14	Yeah, I think it has been very useful. I can't imagine what my classmates are going through because like their English is not as strong. Having to actually write essays in English is, like even I find myself difficult to write in English, even though my native is in English. I think for them it's hard to express themselves because sometimes it gets lost in translation. Yeah, but it helps.

P13	Yeah, I would definitely agree with that. It does help a lot. Although it does also get a little tiresome 'cause everyone expects you to do the vast majority of talking or presenting. 'English is your native language. So, you are good at it.' So, they just kind look at you to talk (P14 nodding) or you in a class, I had a class with majority of Finns and a couple of other international students, but I was the only native speaker. In any sort of group work or discussion, all heads just turned to me, expecting me to say something. Just because I am a native speaker, it's easy for me.
P14	Ok, didn't happen with me (laughing).
P13	Lucky.
P14	But I think group work can be challenging (P13 nodding) when you are working with others whose English is not as strong. There was once, there was this exchange student, I think Italy. Her English is not strong at all, so it was really hard to like communicate with her and make sure our ideas are aligned (P13 nodding) and even when we had to do a presentation, she was really really nervous because it's English and we had to like get her to write a script and actually sit down with her to do it with her.
P13	Yeah, that's one thing I noticed is that too many presentations are..., writing an essay, students, even if their English is not that good, they are more comfortable with writing than they are getting up and actually talking and doing a presentation.
P14	Yeah, that's true.
P13	I've noticed.
P14	Although I prefer presentations than writings. (laughing)
P13	I agree. I've seen a lot of students, they physically hide behind the computer or they, you can tell by their body language, that they are so very uncomfortable because they make themselves smaller and try to hide and they kind of have the script in front of their face.
Interviewer	So, they would prefer rather writing than talking.
P13	Yeah. They'd much prefer that. (P14 nodding) I would say presentation skills are more valuable than essay writing skills.
Interviewer	Just to go back to the individual experiences again. How does it contrast from your previous experiences as a higher education student to be here. Like you have addressed this already a bit (P13 nodding) like that you (addressing P14) come from a more Science background (P14 agreeing) and you are not used to writing essays for example and you (addressing P13) have addressed a bit that, for you it is rather easy because you are used to writing essays, like in two hours (P13: Yeah.), you can get a few pages together. So, again..it helped you, it prepared to a certain extent and for you it may have complicated things. Can you elaborate on that a bit more, if you can.
P14	You mean the writing essays part?

Interviewer	Generally like your previous study experiences for example in an academic context, not only like writing, but also maybe even relationships between people, how you approach them and stuff like that.
P14	I think it is a very, very different environment for me. In (home country P14) it's really competitive, and our class sizes are much larger and we have seminar-styles, most of the time. We have lectures, which usually people skip (slightly laughing) because it is boring and because they also record the lectures, so you can actually watch it at your own free time. There is the seminars, which are maybe 20 to, more more than 30 people in a class and it is also very lecture-based style like the professor would be talking most of the time. So, like even... ah, and we have this thing called class participation, like you can participate in class, you have it as a grade in the end.
P13	Yeah, it's quite common.
P14	But in (home country P14) it is very, how do you say, people are very fixed about it in a way. They make sure that they just raise their hands in class for every class, just to say something. It doesn't have to be something very valuable (P13 slightly laughing), but as long as...
Interviewer	... you say something.
P14	... the professor recognize actually that you are participates, so you get a class participation. It is different here where people genuinely contribute the ideas and add on to the discussion (P13 nodding). Yeah, presentations are very, very formal also in (home country P14) (P13 slightly nodding) and the professor usually looks a lot at your presentation skills (P13 nodding), so we always have to wear like formal wear and all and people get nervous there (looking at P13) because we know that the professor is looking at every tiny bit of detail. Compared to here, you can just turn up casually and wear whatever you want and I don't think that the professors really focus on your presentation skills specifically (P13 nodding). So, it's a lot less stressful for me here. And the whole competitive environment is different here, like people are not competitive here at all. So initially I was quite not competitive, but I do more because I am used to being in a competitive environment. I have to do more, so that I am on par with everyone. But here I am like, at first I would try to 'Let's do more!', but everyone would be like 'No, oh we just need to do this. (P13 slightly laughing) This is according to the task. We don't need to do anything more than that.' So slowly, I sort of like adapted to it. Yeah.
Interviewer	Do you think it is a good thing or a bad thing?
P14	Yeah, that's the thing. I don't know if it is a good or bad thing because it's always good to push yourself a bit more (P13 nodding), so that you can improve on your quality of work, but at the same time if it's from an unhealthy kind of perspective (P13 agreeing), the competitiveness, then it's not good. Yeah, so getting students to produce good work in a healthy way, that's the challenge. Yeah.
P13	I kinda, along that note, when I was doing my student teaching back in (home country P13), my cooperating teacher would give the high school students this presentation

	and he would give them guidelines and say, if you wanna receive, let's say a 3, this is what you do. If you want a better grade, you have to do more, but I am not gonna tell you what it is, but you follow this, you get a 3. And in that way students can kind of push themselves for more. I have been turning over the idea in my head whether that would be a good idea to do, would that be, how would that work, but that would be interesting.
P14	Yeah, I think sometimes when you give those assessment grids, the criteria, people would tend to just like focus on it (P13 nodding).
P13	And limit themselves to that.
P14	Yeah, and say 'Oh yeah, this is what is needed, let's not do the rest.' Yeah.
Interviewer	So, now we look like mainly only on individual experiences still because we have addressed this already a bit, but essay writing and writing an assignment in an academic format. I have also this lovely paper, which I will give you, but I will read it out loud also because it's a quote from the University website, which is related to the final project you have to do here, which is your thesis. So, you have to conduct a small-scale research and write a Master's thesis supervised by professors and senior lecturers. The thesis topics are related to research areas of the Faculty of Education. The thesis process is supported by research method courses, research seminars and individual supervision. So, I just want you to keep this a bit in mind, when we talk about things. But now just related to individual work, which ben related to your thesis or any assignment. How do you approach an individual assignment? Could you think of an example, which you were pleased with and an example where you were disappointed with.
P14	Approach meaning how I (making arm movements of "order/structure") plan my work and build it.
Interviewer	Yeah.
P13	Quite a few times, when I get something, I think first 'Have I done something similar to this?'. A lot of the classes here are fairly similar, for example in Educational Sciences in the pedagogy specialization. There are basically two types of courses. There are either culture courses or there are teaching English to primary school students courses. You've got basically a choice of either of those. And I have taken several from both of those and so I think, when I take a course, I think 'Have I done something like that before?' Then if I have, I look at work I've previously done and see how close it is and then do something maybe based of on that or maybe heavily relying on work I've done previously (P14 nodding). Whether using a lot of the same citations and stuff. If it's something completely original, I'll look into it like I don't understand the topic. For example the identity and agency class, I attended all the workshops and all the seminars and still I didn't quite understand what was going on. So, I just googled it and then looked to see what it was like and about, explained differently so I can understand that. And then based of that try to work in what they want with what I know the concept to be.

Interviewer	Why do you think you didn't understand the concept in class?
P13	Why didn't I or what didn't I understand?
Interviewer	Yeah, like.. Both ways.
P13	<p>I would say, the why didn't is because the teaching of the course was very subpart to put it politely. The professor, the lecturer would walk in, look at the class, no hello or anything, put up her powerpoint, turn her back to the class and read of her powerpoint (P14 smiling) and for people studying Education (P14 nodding), who are educational researchers, they should at least know how to teach, you would think (P14 nodding). So, the delivery in that sense was really, really poorly done. The workshops were much more well done, but it didn't deal with quite the same things and so, I still left the class with a big gap in my understanding. So, yeah I just googled it and found more information online about what identity and agency was about and then from there wrote my paper and if it's a topic I don't quite understand, I tend to use my native English speaker status and abilities and make my language much more flowery (P14 laughing), so that's more difficult to understand and kind of up use scale (check phone recording) what I am actually writing (P14 nodding) and based on the fact that I am a native speaker and I am very active in class (P14 nodding), I usually get the benefit of the doubt in my writing and so, my grades usually 'Oh, if they don't understand, They'll interpret that and know what I am saying.' Maybe the professor doesn't quite understand what I am saying. So I do that sometimes.</p>
P14	<p>Yeah, I think that helps a lot. Like I know like the people who are struggling English in my batch, they tend to do well, better for assignments also because they can express themselves better. But anyway for me, I think I am very used to how it was in (home country P14) like you go for lectures and then you do the last minute work. So, even here I end up doing the same thing. Like I don't value "class time" as much because I used to study on my own a lot. Even though I go for lectures and all, I find it best if I study on my own. So, I actually realized subconsciously I do the same thing here. I don't really participate much in class because I wouldn't be engaged in the topic in classes because I am the kind who needs to go home, read about this and slowly think about the assignment, and suddenly I would have some ideas. So, I am usually not very engaged in classes and usually I am only engaged with the course more when I actually do the assignments. So, for example as writing essays and I have to read articles, when I start looking at those articles, then I will be more engaged. So, what I usually do with those articles, if I have to read a few for the assignment, I write my own notes because that helps me to reinforce what I've read instead of just reading passively and when it is time to write the assignment, I just look at my notes and I have this thing about needing to organize everything. So, I will always like look at my notes and draw common points and write everything down like in a mindmap of some sort and organize my essay before I start to write. And I get frustrated when I don't have time because I always leave it to the last minute and then I will just write random stuff instead of really discussing the articles and then I submit it (P13 nodding) and then I feel really bad about it because it is not a good piece of work. And I am submitting it just because I have to. Yeah.</p>

Interviewer	So, sometimes time management or time to finish the assignment is too narrow.
P14	But, yeah.. Again, that's, it's only... there is no one else to blame than myself (laughing) because i pushed it to the end (laughing) and it keeps repeating.
Interviewer	But in some courses they announce the essay topic...
P14	They always do.
Interviewer Rather late as well. (P13 slightly nodding)
P14	Ahhhh. Oh, yeah. He (P13) was mentioning something and I found it useful because... I am not here to specialize in any specific. So, what was useful for me, was that in each semester I focus on one specialization. So, for example in my first semester I did leadership modules only and it was really useful because you can actually cross-reference from the different courses (P13 nodding) and you are in like... this semester I am focusing on this and for the second semester I am focused on special needs. So, it's easier (P13 nodding) because all the readings you do are similar and all. So, you can actually read it to each other. Yeah, so that would be one suggestion I would give to people if you are not planning to specialize and you can do that.
P13	Yeah. I am a secondary teacher and I have basically no interest in early childhood education. So, for me to take those courses, it's kind of like 'Why am I here?'. Yeah, if you are open to looking at everything, definitely getting that broader... taking a few from here, a few from there, will give you a much broader scope.
P14	Yeah, I think it points out to the reasons why we are here. Like for me, I... because I don't have a background in teaching, but I am sort of teaching, so I wanted to get more background knowledge, which is why I wanted a wider spectrum. Yeah, but if you know what you want (P13: Yeah.), then you would just specialize.
Interviewer	Ok, when we are thinking, the question about an assignment you were pleased with and one you were disappointed with. You (addressing P13) mentioned in the beginning that you were getting sometimes a grade lower than you expected.
P13	(nodding)
Interviewer	I assume that was an assignment you were disappointed with.
P13	Yeah.
Interviewer	Could you elaborate on that?
P13	Yeah, sure. So, again a lot of this goes back to the reflective essays and especially in the first few I wrote where I had written a reflective essay like I would have done from my education classes back in (home country P13) and I am used to those getting good grades and then when I wrote something with a similar format for here, it got a much lower grade than I expected. And I am assuming because, what's expected

	from a reflective essay, isn't the same. And,...
Interviewer	But you actually don't know.
P13	I still am not quite sure what they want in terms of reflective essay. It's again one reason why I have, why I do write things and get stuff done way ahead of time, so that, again with the reflective essays I can write one, submit it and then the instructor's feedback on it and then change it and write a second draft.
P14	Wow.
Interviewer	Ok, what about you (addressing P14)? Any like individual assignments, where you thought 'Hm, that's not good.'
P14	Yeah, most of them.
Interviewer	Ok.
P13, P14	(laughing)
P14	No, they are those where I thought I really did a good job in like combining all the readings together, initially planning, organizing it well. But those I like, I don't get as good grades as those I do last minute (laughing). I actually get a better grade for those. So, but like what I tell myself is that I think that such gradings are very subjective (P13 nodding). So, I could be doing it one way, but the professor is thinking of it in another way. So, it doesn't mean that my work is good or not good, but just whether it, it is aligned with what they are actually looking for. (P13 nodding) Yeah, so, yeah I think that more challenging ones are those that I have to read a lot and summarize them and present my own viewpoints, which is almost every essay (slightly laughing) (P13 nodding). Yeah.
Interviewer	Ok, so for you it's more difficult to write like your own opinion because you are not used to it?
P14	Hm, yeah.
Interviewer	When it comes to writing academically, do you (addressing P13) have any problems there like or is it...
P13	(shaking head)
Interviewer	... because you are quite used to it from back home.
P13	Yeah.
Interviewer	What about you (addressing P14)?
P14	It was very difficult at first, just because I am not familiar with it, everything is new. I didn't know that I had to do like put the references, the citations and all. But we had a course on academic reading and writing (P13 nodding) and through that it helps quite

	a bit, like at least I am now aware that I have to do all those. Yeah, but it is still a challenge to organize my readings, like every time I want to cite something, try to recall where it's from (P13 slightly nodding) which article it is. So, the organization there is still like...
Interviewer	... in process.
P14	Yeah. Yeah, I don't have a proper steps for that.
Interviewer	Ok.
P13	I would say what was hard for me was to adjust to the different citation style. I am used to using footnotes in the Chicago style and so going to APA, that parenthetical citation was.. Ok, I had this huge knowledge of this and now I gotta start something brand new and expand that. So, it's still.. It was a work in process.
Interviewer	So, the different approach and then you had to adjust to that.
P13	Hm (= yes).
Interviewer	Ok, now we look into group work experiences. Basically similar question, but part of.. Here at the University really almost in every course you have group work (P13 nodding), it's a huge part here and similar approach again: How do you approach given assignment, can you give an example you were pleased with and one you were disappointed with. You (addressing P14) addressed this case of this one already where the Italian, who was a Bachelor's student, you know.. or?
P14	I think so.
P13	If it's the one I am thinking, yeah it's Bachelor.
P14	Exchange.
P13	Especially if she is exchange, it's Bachelor.
Interviewer	So, could you elaborate on this a bit more? Did you have to do a presentation or write something together or how did it go?
P14	So, it was group work with four of us and it was one of the very earlier presentations that I had to do. So, we only like, the whole group only met two or three times. She didn't contribute much to the content and also because personally I like to do more in a sense because then I can put in what I want to put in. So, I'll be doing the stuff and then I'll be asking for their opinions and we will change a lot on the way. For her it was, because she is also an exchange student, so she was traveling a bit during that period also I think. So, she was not there in one or two of the sessions. So, the day, I think one or two days before the presentation, we were at the university library and we were becoming feeling all nervous and she has a friend with her, who is a bit better in English. So she was doing some kind of translation for her, but basically for me, I am

	<p>ok with helping her. I have one other group mate who thinks that we should not be doing the work for her because, you know, we are all adults and we should all be doing our parts. But to me like, I feel like if I can help, I'll just help as much as I can, if I have time. So what we did, was to sit her down and just really having to go through the points with her like 'Do you understand this? Do you understand that? Can you say this? Can you say that?'. So, in the end we even tried to write a script for her, so that she can just read from it. Even during the presentation, we would be like reassuring her 'It is ok, it's ok, just read from the script. No one will say anything.' Yeah, so.</p>
Interviewer	<p>But maybe then it's not really disappointing group work when you have...</p>
P14	<p>Yeah, I guess like ideally everybody should put in like their own parts and everybody would have some kind of synergy, but in this case it was like we were helping her. So, if you have time, it's really not a big issue, but imagine that you, this is in another part of the school term where we all equally stressed about this stuff and then having to pull her along, it will be a bit challenging and could be frustrating for some people.</p>
Interviewer	<p>What about you (addressing P13)? Any disappointing, or we can also start with the pleased one, well-working.</p>
P13	<p>Well, I'll start with the pleasing one. Once you start to understand other people's style is, the good parts about a cohort system is you get to work with the same people quite often and so I've done quite a few projects with the same kind of core people. And now that we understand each others' style (P14 nodding) and kind of how we think. It goes a lot more smoothly than say in the beginning. So, that is a big benefit. Plus when you, it's one thing to just have to take in information, but if you then have to synthesize it and express it, you learn a lot more and it's a better measure of understanding than say even just writing an essay or you are citing, you are talking about what other people say quite often. So, you can kind just get away from having it actual analysed. So, I can understand why we do a lot of presentations (P14 nodding), it does help quite a bit. Plus for the professors it's easier to and quicker to grade a presentation (P14 nodding) than to read someone's essay and give it feedback. On the flipside though, there are quite a few incidents where you have a presentation for presentation's sake (P14 nodding, smiling). There is one class here, it's, I am glad that we have it as an education student and I get to kinda make fun of my science friends for this. But we have a class, we met three times for two hours total and then we did a group presentation during the third time. So, basically two class meetings and then one meeting a presentation. And there were six people doing a 20 minute group presentation, so way too many people, too small of a time period (P14 nodding) and it was five credits for this class and everybody in this class got a five except for one group, who the professor really didn't like. And when I talk to my science friends, who have to do like a week of camping out in the wilderness identifying mushrooms and they get two credits for that (P14 smiling). In comparison it's pretty much nothing.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So, there was not the like the workload you put it in, is not equally in the credits.</p>
P13	<p>Yeah, I think with our group presentation we put in a good solid 15 minutes of actual work in the presentation and then, yeah we gave our presentation. It was a complete</p>

	and utter joke of a class and of a presentation and it basically was just a presentation for presentation's sake. I've noticed quite often that every class requires a presentation, but not every class kinda should have a presentation. (P14 nodding) If that kinda makes sense. To go back to the agency class, in the workshop we had to do a presentation and that was great. The presentation really covered what agency is, how do you express it, how do you deal with it, how do you work with it. So that was really good in there, but in some of the classes I've had, it was kinda 'Why, why am i doing this?'
Interviewer	What's the purpose.
P13	'Why am I here?' Yeah. (P14 nodding)
Interviewer	When you think about writing together, as a group, an essay. How does that work for you? Or has worked so far.
P14	I think most of the time, we write our own parts (P13 nodding) and put it together, which kinda annoys me because like it is easy, it is a lot easier to do that way, but the whole essay becomes very disconnected (P13 nodding). It doesn't flow from anybody (?), everyone has their own language style and then it would take more time if I wanted to fix it. For example one person goes through the whole essay and try to make it more consistent, but again usually we don't have time for that. Yeah, Those essays I am proud of as a group, are those that we actually, someone does the writing, like everyone contributes idea in point forms and all that, but someone does the whole writing.
Interviewer	So one person only of the whole group.
P14	Yeah. I don't know if that's like equal distribution, but I find it more useful, especially if that person is better in writing English, but probably the person who is better in English will probably find himself all the time writing all the essays (slightly laughing). But I think it's still better than everybody writing their own part, it doesn't feel like group work at all. It is just like four people coming together to write individual parts and just pack all together.
P13	That's what my groups usually do when we have to do a group writing assignment, we each do our own parts and put them together and then since I am the native speaker (P14 laughing) and I worked as an English teacher, I'll go through and I'll edit and fix, shift things around to make the flow better. But I do agree that, the way you (addressing P14) mentioned was, it is more of a group essay in that sense because then you get to negotiate points and discuss and some might put a list of points and another person will say 'Well, I don't see that at all. How do you come up with this?' (P14 nodding). So you do kind of, it is more of a reflection of everyone's thoughts instead of just everyone chucks in a couple of paragraphs and then...
Interviewer	But then also you need time to actually have the discussion about your thoughts.
P13, P14	Yeah.

P13	So, that kinda goes back to time management as well.
Interviewer	An example of mine is for example that, what I was really pleased with, it was, though people were abroad, like we had two people being outside of Finland and two were here. The two here met, the two abroad came online and we actually wrote the essay together at the same time. So, it was really interesting. We had Skype open, we were not talking necessarily loud, but like the two who were in Finland talked to each other and then we were discussing and gave feedback on the way. That was personally for me a very nice experience, I have never had that before. It was feeling very accomplishing.
P13	Ok, I've got a fairly similar case. It is not quite exactly in the realm of the education here, but I am part of a student group called (name of student organisation), (...). Well, what (name of the student organisation) stands for.. I should know this being (name of the student organisation) guy. But then, I was a board member, and at the start of our, the elections for the new board for the current board, I was the only one, there were two of us actually in Jyväskylä, but we had to have a board meeting to approve the new members before the... we had the general meeting and we didn't have quorum in all four board meetings and so our vice president, our president quickly got on Skype and then there was two of us and then another person got on Skype, who is in Ireland and our president was back in England and we just quickly had a meeting and did all, took us about five minutes to go quick on Skype to just have a quick board meeting putting together work in that sense. Yeah, doing it even if you are abroad, you can still have a good connection, communication of ideas (P14 nodding) and work together in that sense.
P14	Yeah, I think the best groups are those that you actually feel like it's a group work like doing it as a team (P13 nodding) instead of individually.
P13	Especially you can trust the other people in the group. I've had those experiences quite often where.. The bad part about some of these classes is, there are a mixture of Bachelor and Master classes, Master students. So, you have people who don't really know much about education yet (P14 nodding) because they are still doing their Bachelor's and when you are in a group with them and you have to do group work, you constantly having to basically teach them and you are almost doing their part for them, even though you are scaffolding them along, you are still basically doing half of their work, at least for them. (P14 nodding) And that could get really frustrating. But when you trust your group members and people you know and trust to work with, you know they can do quality work, then yeah it can be much better experience.
P14	Yeah.
Interviewer	I have had the theme of trust in the previous groups as well. They were addressing issues of plagiarism though.
P13	Ok.
Interviewer	So, if you, they had experiences where basically they didn't know their group members yet because in the first semester or in the case of having Bachelor's

	students for example, it is quite randomly put together sometimes. Did you have any experiences of where you had to deal with people plagiarizing?
P14	Not for me.
P13	(shaking head slowly) Not that I can think of.
Interviewer	Ok, we had cases discussed where students were not aware of what actually plagiarism is.
P13	Ok.
Interviewer	So, the student group members had to deal with the fact that they had to explain like how to cite, how to reference. They had no previous knowledge of doing that either, but nobody told them also.
P13	I have anecdotal experience of that, people that I know in my cohort who have talked about having been in a group where this has been a problem. 'This person doesn't even know how to cite a source, can you believe it? Blablabla.' (P14 nodding) So, I've yeah got experience with that, but for the most part I don't have any direct experience with it.
Interviewer	Ok. So, now we look into the support measures here provided at the university. And I quote a lady called Pecorari, I assume Italian: "Ideally academic support should be constructed around the needs of the students." So, we can think about that. So, there are in here, in this university, we have research methods courses, we have academic reading and writing and I think you have an equivalent to that, but I don't remember the name..
P13	Hmhm.
Interviewer	Which you have in the first and the second semester.
P13	Yeah. Integrative research communication.
Interviewer	Yes, thanks. They have told me before, but I don't remember the name.
P13	Yeah.
Interviewer	To what extent have you been supported for your academic work here at JYU. So, this is also related maybe to thesis work, but also assignments etc. Are you satisfied with the support you receive, yes, no, why?
P14	Well, I think the academic reading and writing course was good to have, especially for me with no background. I am not sure what the others with background actually think because it could be quite basic for them. Like I think that academic reading and writing courses could be more useful. I mean it is useful as an introduction and all, but it could cover more in depth. The research methods, the quantitative and qualitative courses were good introductions as well and it's quite basic. So, again like if you already have experience in it, it will not be useful. So, I was thinking maybe these

	<p>courses could maybe be optional (P13 slightly nodding). But, yeah like everybody goes through it, it's quite basic. So, again there is no depth in all those courses. Yeah, I know qualitative... for example, I have never done qualitative before, so it is good to know that there all these different methods and all. Especially that if for my thesis I do qualitative, then I' be asking why am I doing the quantitative module (P13 nodding) and I don't even intend to do quantitative research. So that question is like there. But I think those are useful. I think those are the only courses that support...</p>
Interviewer	<p>You have I think research seminars...</p>
P14	<p>Ah, I think I have started on those.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Ah, ok. That might be, yeah. What about P13?</p>
P13	<p>I am a bit further along and the integrative research communication course, kind of our version of it, they have a new professor this year, so it's much better than mine.</p>
Interviewer	<p>How come?</p>
P13	<p>In my year, the professor, the first class was a well-structured class, but then he was quitting his job at the end of the year and he was going on paternity leave real soon anyways. So, the whole basically from middle of September onwards, you could tell the quality of the class just plummeted to the point where we would have a four hour class and then he get about half way, a little more than half way through and say 'Well, I am done for the day, you guys can go home. See you later'. Just like 'Oh, oh,okay.' Yeah, he is gone now, they got a new person and from, I was just talking to two of the first year students, who have the class and they love the new professor. Some of the other courses like I would kinda disagree about making the quantitative and qualitative optional, especially if just going to do qualitative research, why do I need a quantitative class? Well, there is still a vast body of research in quantitative, so if you don't know what cronbach's alpha is, you don't know what all these different statistical analyses are, how are you going to understand that quantitative research and I kinda have that, I am not gonna say problem, but I have that circumstance now with my thesis 'cause I am doing a quantitative method of analysis, but my supervisor doesn't understand quantitative research. She generally doesn't understand what the correlation matrix is and that, if you don't understand this kind of, if you don't understand any sort of quantitative research or understand qualitative, then it makes reading the research almost impossible. So, I think definitely making those two (P14 nodding) mandatory, they have, again, there is a different quantitative professor this year compared to what I had and the one I had, all of our research, all the data, everything was all in Finnish. So, we had to first translate that and then try to figure out, what was going on and his classes were not 'This is a T-Test.', but more 'If you click on this and click on that and click on that, that's your T-Test.' Kinda, 'If you click on this and click on this and click on this, that's One Way Anova.' But you don't understand what these actually are mean. (P14: Yeah.) So, they could be delivered much better. Although, it would be much more difficult to do that because the level of math and statistics for people vary quite a bit. (P14 nodding) Before coming here, I haven't taken a math class since 2006, 2005 yeah. It's my third year of high school, my last math class. (P14 smiling) And so for me to do now quantitative research, it's</p>

	(smiling). But I've also had then also good support. My thesis supervisor knowing that she doesn't know quantitative research, she then set me up with a guy here, who took time of his schedule 'cause he is a researcher and not even a professor, he's just a faculty researcher and he has taken time out to help me with my research to go over my thesis and he is not even gonna be my secondary supervisor, he has basically done this out of the good of his own heart. So, I have gotten a lot of great support in that sense.
Interviewer	That's great.
P14	Yeah, like in that case I think that because I feel like the quantitative research methods course is really just teaching you how to use SPSS.
P13	Yeah, it's very, very basic.
P14	Yeah, so if, I think I agree with you that it would be useful to know , actually know how to interpret those in the articles that we read. So, maybe the course could be more modified...
P13	Yes, structured...
P14	So, we actually look at articles and 'Ok, what does this really mean?'. So, that it is more relevant to all of us (P13 nodding) instead of us just using SPSS.
P13	Yeah, more about how to read it (P14 nodding) than how to actually do it.
P14	Yeah, like we know like this thing is called a T-Test, but even after having then SPSS, I have no idea what it really, really means.
P13	Yeah.
P14	So, if we could look at it in context of an article like 'Ok, this article says T-Test blablabla, it means this... (making hand movement for blank space).' Yeah, that would be more useful.
Interviewer	Ok, so you addressed actually already my next question, which is related to the recommendations and you made quite a few already. Do you have anything to add there?
P13	I would like to add putting in more methods courses and taking into account previous experiences as well. For example, in my undergrad, I have done a couple of research classes and then, I have done these and I've also been a teacher for a while and I've got a lot of experience and none of it was recognized when I came here whereas European students, theirs was all recognized. So, they didn't have take these, some of these research courses.
Interviewer	In what sense recognized?
P13	For example, there is, it's basically like an introduction to education class and in (home country P13) we call it Education 101, it's the absolute most basic education

	<p>course and it's given here mostly to Bachelor exchange students or people without a background in education at all, maybe they have done like a Teach for India thing, but never studied education, so they might not know who the theorists are or they won't understand the theories (P14 nodding). I have a Bachelor's in education and some experience teaching and I had to take it.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Did they explain this to you, why you had to take it, what was the reason?</p>
P13	<p>Because they couldn't see it in my past, in my transcripts. Even though in my transcripts, I have all these education theory courses spelled out. It was basically, the only people who didn't have to take it, were the European students, who had a Bachelor's in Education. So, while even myself, non-European, I still had to take it and another non-European student with a Bachelor's in Ed still had to take this class.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Interesting.</p>
P13	<p>And then...</p>
Interviewer	<p>Have you ever discussed this with them?</p>
P13	<p>Yeah, I have discussed this my programme coordinator and they are making changes and taking more things into account. Right now I am currently very active in dealing with the faculty, I got a meeting in a couple of weeks actually with the head of all the international Master's programmes as part of (name of student organisation) I am working with a, to kinda change, make recommendations and my Master's thesis is on this. International students in Education. But going back to the different methods classes, kind of more in depth that this is qualitative analysis, but maybe what kinds of qualitative analysis 'cause there are like diary analysis (P14: Yeah.), and there are many types of qualitative. So, delving into that more 'cause most of the like quantitative, most people just deal 'This is my survey.' and then qualitative tends to basically just be 'Oh, let me interview you.' So, expanding on the different types of qualitative and quantitative might be very good to have.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Do you (addressing P14) have anything to add what you would like to see differently or more supported or added?</p>
P14	<p>Not really. I can't think of any right now because I don't think I have a lot of (laughing) experience in here also, so I don't know what's missing. Yeah, but definitely they could improve the current courses that they do, to be more relevant.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Yeah. I have a question, which is related to your development as a student here. In what ways do you think you have developed as a student academically here at the university. You (addressing P14) have actually quite learned a lot about like reading and writing academic texts and citing, referencing, you mentioned that you haven't done that before.</p>
P14	<p>Yeah, I guess that could be considered a development (laughing).</p>
P13	<p>Oh yeah, definitely.</p>

P14	Yeah, from not knowing how to do all this to actually doing all this and eventually having to do it for my thesis. Yeah, that (laughing) yeah. Yeah, I don't know what else to say (slightly laughing).
Interviewer	That's fine.
P13	I've developed a bit in terms of being able to do, I can now do quantitative analysis and I can understand quantitative articles and do the analysis. So, I definitely agree to that. And that's kind of about it.
Interviewer	Ok, so this is related to my last questions, basically it is referring to the whole session we just had. What do you feel was the most important thing we talked about in this session here. And is there anything you would me like to add to ask you or the future groups.
P14	Yeah, I think we discussed a lot about writing essays. I am not sure if it's the focus of your session. (laughing)
Interviewer	Part of it.
P13	Yeah.
Interviewer	Definitely.
P13	I would say, instead of just focusing on completion methods of writing the, we talked about the writing the essay and then presentations, but there is much more in the classes like the group discussions, class participation. Maybe something around that. And also more meta of the programme as a whole. We talked a lot about specific incidents of this or that, but then your impressions on the programme as a whole, maybe worth going into as well.
Interviewer	Ok, yeah.
P14	I think, what would have helped me in this session, is if you could like put the topics here, your area of focus because sometimes I forget and then, because I am a quite visual person, so when you are speaking, I may not fully understand, observe everything. So, that would be useful for me.
P13	By topics, you mean the questions themselves?
P14	Yeah, or even the main topic of this discussion because I don't know, sometimes I will read it and going somewhere...
Interviewer	I think the problem with that for example is.. Because you have addressed sometimes topics before I actually I actually asked them to you. (P13 nodding)
P14	Ah.
Interviewer	This might irritate people as well because they are like 'Oh, it's kind structured.' but in the end it is actually not that structured. I went back and forth now. (P13 and P14

	nodding). I sometimes gave people my paper, I turned it around and showed them the bunch of questions I have 'cause that's sometimes quite complicated I think. But, yeah I would work on that, that's true.
P13	Or maybe integrate the white board (pointing to the board on the wall), some sort of a powerpoint and just flash the next question up and then we discuss. Yeah.
P14	Yeah.
P13	And that way, you flash them up and we've already discussed that. 'Yeah, we talked about that. Anything else you wanna add to this before, we move on?'
Interviewer	Basically I have done this the way now.
P14	Yeah.
Interviewer	Without having this on the board.
P13 & 14	(nodding) Yeah.
Interviewer	Ok, there was one question the first group wanted me to ask future groups. And I am not sure if that is related yet to you (addressing P14) because you are a first year student, but the question was: Are you finishing your thesis in time?
P13	(nodding) I am, I know quite a few who aren't and for various reasons, mostly they have changed their topic a couple of times and haven't really had time to catch up. I know that the thesis is structured here, the ready process, the whole process here is a bit different than other places. I know a couple of universities in (home country P13) and a friend of mine did one in Germany where your thesis was your fourth semester, that's basically all you did, it was just your thesis, but you don't really think about it, you don't do any work on it ahead of that. So, if you like they are good and bad parts about it like I had my topic almost since I started and so I was able to constantly add to that to help me get it done in time. If I kicked myself in the but and did work over the summer, I could have probably finished it sooner whereas a lot of people they pick something they think this is what they want and they'll change, change again, but they haven't really had time to work on it until the spring and they don't feel like they gonna finish in time. Especially when data collection is required (P14 nodding). And so a lot of these other programmes, I know of are more Master's in Arts where it's more the art of teaching and so they'll, the data collection will be much quicker and easier (P14 nodding). It's mostly just observations from their own classroom instead of delving into doing, having to go back to India for example and collect data or I know one person who went to an African country, whose name escapes me, to collect his data. He did his whole research based on that data collection and got the go ahead to go down there do collect data, went down there collected data and then the people said 'Oh, this data is kind of negative towards us. Yeah, you can't use it.' And so he wasn't allowed to use the data and had to come back here and scramble to...
Interviewer	Ok, so the data he collected there at the organisation there in Africa.

P13	Yeah, and then they didn't want him to use that. Yeah, did all that, went to Africa, collected the data and then the organization realized that it wouldn't show a positive light on the organization. They would show up, they do have some negative aspects and so they said 'Oh no, don't use this.'
Interviewer	But, he could have like kind of made it anonymous, so like a sample case without given the name or...
P13	Yes, they didn't want him to use any of the data at all. So, they refused the permission. And so then now he had to come back here and figure out like all his methods, all that, had to redo everything and while taking still extra classes, so he is scrambling. I think he is finishing on time.
Interviewer	Ok, and that's basically it. Thank you.