

Pair Interview 5

<p>Interviewer</p>	<p>I would like to welcome you 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 in a Finnish higher education institution - which in this case, is the University of Jyväskylä. You know my name, but 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, in various ways, 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>The focus group discussion should not last longer than an hour. So, we should be ready by 12, a bit after maybe. Please note that the session is video-and audio-recorded. You have received the informed consent sheet and you have signed it. And yeah, let's start.</p> <p>So, basically the whole session is divided into your individual experiences, then working in groups, then support measures here at JYU and then I give you also space to provide recommendations if necessary.</p>
<p>P10</p>	<p>Ok.</p>
<p>P9</p>	<p>Yeah.</p>
<p>Interviewer</p>	<p>You represent part of a diverse student group here at JYU, you bring a variety of teaching and learning backgrounds with you, motivations and experiences as well. I will give you a short introduction to each other about you because I have done this pre-questionnaire. Just, very shortly. So, P9 is (nationality P9) she is as you P10 Educational Leadership student, 2nd year. And you (addressing P9) have done something which is called in (home country P9) a "(name of the degree)" (P9 nodding) with submission of a thesis. And the whole degree was in (mother tongue P9) and you had though students or classmates in your group, which had migration background. (P9 nodding) And additionally, you had some courses conducted as well in English,</p>

	<p>where exchange students participated. (P9 nodding) And additionally, you have completed two semesters abroad in (ENL environment), which were completely in English and your thesis was completed as well in English. Then we have P10 and I think this is your highest degree you have because I assume you have previous degrees (P10: Yeah). So, you have done a Master's programme with submission of thesis and it was set in (home country P10) and with native, like local people from (home country P10) (P10 nodding), but from various backgrounds within (home country P10). (P10: Right). And I think the thesis was also submitted in English.</p>
P10	In English. That's right.
Interviewer	<p>Ok. So, in the beginning this is all based in your like individual experiences. Basically I will ask you a group of questions and you can just talking about it if you want.</p> <p>How do you manager 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? (P9, P10 slight laughter) It's a bunch of questions, I am aware of that.</p>
P10	If you wanna get started... (hand movement for "just go").
P9	No, you start because I need to collect my thoughts first if you have already something to share.
P10	Can you repeat the questions, please?
Interviewer	<p>Yeah.</p> <p>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.</p>
P10	Ok. How do I manage. Hm. In terms of balancing studies and other things as well.
Interviewer	Yeah, your academic environment here at JYU basically. But of course your personal life might influence this as well.
P10	<p>Yeah, ok. I think for me personally there are multiple roles, probably many of us play. (P9 nodding) So, academics was one part of my life in Jyväskylä. As far as studies concerned, I think there is a lot of family support that comes in just in terms of their physical presence, it helps a lot. But I do bank on support from colleagues or friends whenever it's needed, like talking to them, also sometimes I speak to the seniors, the people from the other batch and have a bounce of ideas using them as a sounding board at times. I think those have been some support systems that have been there in place, but primarily it's a lot of individual work (P9 nodding) and your own brainstorming and trying to put things together. A huge chunk of your studies is involved with dealing with your own ideas, thoughts, trying to collide there. Hm, what else? I think there is a lot of academic reading that had to be done and I am kind of doing this intense reading probably after a long time. I've been doing intense work in</p>

	<p>education for a long time, but it's very different from doing reading articles and trying to make sense out of them (P9 nodding) or I think what really takes your energy is, getting ideas from different articles and somewhere building your own knowledge base from that. That takes a lot of time and energy. Just reading articles is not so intense by itself as an activity. Hm, what was the other one? What your experiences have been?</p>
Interviewer	<p>Yeah.</p>
P10	<p>I think it has been thoroughly enjoyable because I think I am also academically oriented, like I enjoy reading, writing, this whole process of being in an educational setting is very motivating for me. So, overall it has been very pleasant, very engaging, very intense. I think the challenge has been like probably many of you are already familiar with, is I would have enjoyed more of, some more intense teamwork (slightly laughing) where we are handling some real projects, real educational challenges (P9 nodding). I would have preferred, we having disagreements and then agreeing on something or finding solutions to something in that sense. I felt that that was very, very moderated all through the programme. Because when you are in an actual work setting and when you are dealing with issues, that kind of interactions that are needed, was not something that the programme actually provides, I feel, which I said it should.</p>
P9	<p>Well, you were saying, you would be quite motivated in this environment. I must say my motivation dropped a lot from the beginning of my studies. I am quite disappointed with the programme itself because it does not cater to my needs and what I am wanting to do in the future that much. It focusses in my opinion too much on primary, secondary school, not so much on higher education, which I am super interested in. Although, I do have the opportunities to choose my essay topics (P10 nodding) most of the times, so I try to then find my way and find my topic there. Yeah, I have been dragging a lot of deadlines, I still have assignments from last semester open now and that has been happening I think since the second semester. I think first semester was fine, but since then 'cause there was just too much at once and also, as you (addressing P10) were saying, I am not only here to study, I am also working in (student organisation) which takes a lot of my time, but I enjoy that because I do practical work. And then working and social life, too. So, it's not just studying for me. So, it's been quite tough for me to find the time because I am such... I am so demotivated at the moment to finish my assignments. I've been setting myself deadlines 'Ok, end of March, I will be done with everything. Ok, end of April.' and it's been moving and moving, moving. Yeah, because at the moment, I don't enjoy reading and writing that much, I am super looking forward to getting it done. So that I can do work and put my hands onto something, which I've been doing in (student organisation) and that's what I enjoy much more. Yeah, what was... am I missing something?</p>
Interviewer	<p>Well, what has gone well and what has been difficult?</p>
P9	<p>Well, well is that I still manage to get my stuff done at some point or the other and I manage to do a minor, which was more motivating for me because of something I was</p>

	more interested in, some of the courses I had to take. Not so well, well... that I am still dragging my assignments with me and...
Interviewer	Why do you think the motivation went down?
P9	I don't know, just like... the classes in my opinion got worse like in the beginning it was fine, but then afterwards, some time... the courses were just boring for me like I went there because I had to go, but most of the time I was on my computer doing other stuff because what was provided in the course was not something interesting to me. And yeah, then doing the assignment because you have to do it, is also like not so cool. I don't know, maybe because I realized that for me it's... I am not the study kind of person. I can study but like putting my hands onto something and actually working, is something I enjoy more at the moment.
Interviewer	So, like P10 mentioned also like the practical aspects. Like, doing actual things.
P10	(nodding)
P9	Yeah. And I also enjoy much more the teamwork like and presentations especially. I used to hate presentations in my previous degree (P10 slightly laughing). Whenever there was a presentation, I was like... or they had option presentation or assignment, I was like 'Ok, I will go with the assignment. I hate presentations.' But now I like them much more because for me they don't take as much time and effort or at least it doesn't feel like it's taking so much of my energy. Even though, sometimes it's hard to work with different people, but that's the challenge and you learn from that, so. I like doing that more.
Interviewer	Ok. When you...
P10	One thing, if I can add...
Interviewer	Yeah.
P10	... that helped a lot, was taking one semester off completely for an internship, was like very refreshing, very energizing and very re-assuring in the sense of being here and doing something productive (P9 nodding). It was also challenging because I had to plan like most of my studies in the first year and actually make sure I have a semester completely open for doing something like this. And then trying to wrap up everything in the last semester. But I think these internships were that burst of energy (P9: Yeah) that came in between.
Interviewer	Ok. When you compare this programme or your studies here at the university with your previous programmes, do you think it helped you to study here, did it prepare you to study here in this academic environment. Is it different? Did it complicate things?
P9	For me it's a lot different, like... at least from what I understood and from my own experience is that (home country) universities are a lot different from here. Ok, first of all, here we are a really small group of students in our programme. There we started with like 500 people, we narrowed down to like 50 in some fields, like... 'cause I was

	<p>studying different topics, I was with different people all the time. But most of the time was big lectures or big seminars. They were still called seminars, but in the end they turned out to be lectures. Maybe we had to do some group work and present that at one point or the other. So, that's completely different. I have never done research. So, that was completely new to me. My previous thesis was based on literature review basically. And there nobody helped me. I submitted my outline to my professor and he never got back to me. So, at one point, I just started because I had to get it done and then, at the end I only got my grade and feedback. That's it. So, nobody supported me in any way in academic reading and writing at all. Yeah, no research. I think what prepared me bit was going abroad myself and then working with other people there like international people there to come here and work in an more international environment here. But, other than that I don't think I had any preparation for this programme. How was it for you (addressing P10)?</p>
<p>P10</p>	<p>It was a world apart (smiling) (P9 and P10 laughing). Very different. We were a small group though, in the Master's programme. We were around 16 of us. Very mixed cohort, in the sense that some of them were not sure why they were there. They were still trying to find some footing in their life, but some of them were very interested in the subject. This was a Master's in (name of the Master's degree programme), that I have. The good part of it, was there was a lot of practical work. We were engaged in many activities in the university itself and we worked a lot with the Juniors, like the ones which were in the Bachelor's degree, which was a huge plus point, I felt so. And that, in those terms there was a lot of interaction between the Master student and the Bachelor degree student. What else? In terms of the teaching itself, it was, it was very staggered in the sense there were some teachers who were very passionate about what they were teaching. There were some who were like saturated after years of teaching and I don't think they had the same motivation for the subject anymore. Thirdly, it was a government run university in the sense that it comes basically under the state government, this university. So, we had huge issues as far as the resources go like you didn't have access to resources. So, in that way for me this environment is very open, very accessible, in terms of what knowledge resources and in terms of just physical resources. People are very accessible (P9: True. Nodding) for me and that's like a.... So, that itself becomes a point of motivation. The fact that you can so easily talk to a professor, reach them, email them, get back information, get articles. For me it's a huge plus point (P9 nodding) as a student. In terms of research, I think I got my footing more strongly here than I did over there. Thirdly, like therefore any kind of, for your thesis work I had to like travel to libraries outside my state, visit, live there for months together to have access to their thesis, their phd dissertations. Read through them, there was nothing in soft copy. Everything was from paper, written down, brought home, typed (laughing). (P9: Wow) So, it was like reading through hundreds and hundreds of files before you actually find what you want and the materials are there but there is nobody to tell you where to look, what to do. Things like that. So, it is very challenging. So, for me this is like 'Wow.' (laughing) (P9 laughing) Click of a button I have things, which is so beautiful. In (home country P10) it's changed a lot now. Now there is plenty that's available online. The government has taken huge steps, but when I did this programme it was a huge challenge. But it was also beautiful because you were going elsewhere, you were seeing what that university worked like, meeting students from there. So, it did build certain bridges in those</p>

	<p>phases, which was beautiful. But again, a very different setting altogether. Yeah. And I think I am more appreciative of what's here because I have gone through experiences like that.</p>
P9	<p>Yeah, yeah.</p>
Interviewer	<p>When you think about.. Because we have discussed this in the previous groups a bit, the matter of language. Both of you have submitted your thesis in English. Do you think, because the whole programme is now in English, you (addressing P10) have done a whole programme in English, but you (addressing P9) haven't. Do you think language had an influence on your work?</p>
P9	<p>In the thesis, you mean? Or the work here?</p>
Interviewer	<p>Here.</p>
P9	<p>Yeah, of course like... I have been working...I have studied in English in (home country P9), but it was a little bit of like grammar and linguistics and then looking more into like the teaching perspective because that was the background. And then I went to (ENS environment) for two semesters and studied completely in English there. So... and I used to go to an international school when I was younger for three years where I was taught in English. So, I think I had quite a good background of English. Though I still believe it developed more here. But having this basis already, I think helped a lot. Especially looking at some of our classmates, who maybe are not as fluent in English as we are, who had trouble reading the articles because they are not so fluent in reading and it took them a long time to read. I think that's a good advantage. Yeah. But then if I remember my thesis that I wrote, the feedback I got. I did get a good grade but the like main point why it wasn't as high as I wanted it to be, was my language because I didn't write in the right register, it was a lot colloquial English, which I wasn't aware of because nobody ever taught me. So, like... the register wasn't the right one, so no academic reading and writing again. I didn't have any background in that. So, that was missing. I hope I kinda developed that here. I don't know.</p>
P10	<p>I think for me, I don't think drastically my language abilities have changed after coming here. It's been pretty much the same, but English is something I was introduced to right from when I was a baby maybe. At home it was something that was always spoken, books were in English, story books. My father is an avid reader, so novels. He kept introducing books to us. We fought in English as siblings (laughing). So, it's been a very like natural language in many ways. So,... but in terms of academic reading and writing I think it primarily developed more in (home country P10) than I would say over here, during my Bachelor's programme and my Master's programme as well. Cause generally those articles are quite well written, what you read like the books are well written. Sadly, many of them come from the West. There are not many that are local books or things that you read. But they are still available. So, I don't think there has been a major shift in terms of language for me, yeah.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So, this is still continuing with individual experiences. Because here at JYU it is often your task to write an essay at the end of a course or approaching the end in an</p>

	<p>academic format. This is referred to academic writing. Additionally, and I will quote this, but I will give this, so you can take a look at it. This is a quote from the university website. Additionally, the so-called final project is to conduct a small-scale research and write a Master's thesis 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 we think about this, your final project is your thesis, but doing the courses you have a lot of things which prepare you for writing the thesis. And we will look now into like for example assignments you were given throughout.</p> <p>How do you approach a given assignment? Can you think of an example of an assignment you were pleased with and why and can you give an example of an assignment you were disappointed with and why. And this is only individual work right now. We have similar questions related to group work after this section.</p>
P10	<p>Ok, assignments. I think, the steps I normally take are... well.. Attending classes regularly as much as possible (laughing), trying to get a grasp of what's being spoken about.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So, this helps you, attending the class?</p>
P10	<p>It does to at least 50% of... I think, just get a whole lot of the topic. You don't go really deep into the topic. I think the way the programmes are structured here are in the sense that it's a lot of your own individual work. The more you dwell into a topic and go deeper into it, the more you get out of it. From just the classes, I think it's just like... at a very base level you have ideas (P9 nodding) because there is only so much you can do in the number of hours you actually meet as students. There is not much you can do. But you can introduce a lot of things. So, it is up to you really. So, first is attending classes. Second is reading what has been provided as course material. I don't read all of them very sincerely, but when I skim through something and it just holds my attention, I tend to read those a little more than the others which I just kind of actually just skim and run through. There are some which I completely discard because I just don't connect to those articles and something I can't connect to, I can't (laughing) make it a part of my reading or writing (P9 smiling, nodding) at all. And then I look for my own articles again, start searching from data bases, read more of those and then somewhere try to put some correlations between what has been given and what am I interested in. I think the next step is to find one small area in this whole subject that is of very keen interest (P9 slight nodding) to me or that got my attention through the whole course and read more on that specific area and then write a more focused essay. My essays were generally on a very core topic, they were not very general in terms of what came out. Also, I think there is something else I wanted to talk about. Yeah, I think for me since I am into storytelling a lot, I try to make it like a story. I try to have a beginning, introduce, I try to build on the plot, I try to have a climax or conclusion and I just, for me stories give coherence, stories are also repetitive in certain ways. Repetitive in very meaningful way, not that you just blindly say something over and over again. Try to bring back connections to what was said earlier. So, these are I think helpful things to write assignments. Yeah.</p>

P9	<p>For me, not all of the classes helped. Like as I said earlier, some of the classes were just so uninteresting for me or I felt demotivated being there that I didn't pay attention what has been said. And then after that, most what I got from the course, is reading myself on the topic and then trying to connect the articles that we are given or the articles that I found myself, too. Connect them and bring them together in an essay. And how I normally go about it, is that I start reading and if I feel like I have a good basis of understanding the concept for example that I have to present, then I start like trying to define that with the help of the articles. And then I usually start not reading everything, like I stop reading everything, I just go with search in the .pdf files and look for specific paragraphs that could help me in the article. And from that I just go with whatever comes to my mind and write that down and usually it works out quite well. You were asking about an assignment we were pleased and not so pleased with, right? I've been trying to think about that. I mean many assignments I was not so pleased about because I just had to do them but, hm... on that I was pleased about a lot was the Leadership Philosophy that we had to write where it was like just about ourselves with some background, but thinking about what kind of leader do we wanna be because that for me was a very meaningful assignment.... 'Cause I could also connect it to what I am doing in (student organisation) because I am being a leader there and I could see already myself what kind of leader I am, what I don't like about myself being a leader and connect that to my personal life whereas a lot of other things, even though I said I try to connect them to what I would like to do in the future, at points I just can't and then it's hard for me to connect it to my life or my future and see the value in that. Those are more like 'Ehh', I don't know, I just do them (slightly laughing).</p>
Interviewer	Were you ever disappointed because the question was related to like with the outcome?
P9	Grades?
Interviewer	Yeah, for example or any kind of feedback which you were disagreeing with or not satisfied with and you simply actually may not know why.
P9	Well, most of the time I got quite good grades. Like 4s and 5s, which I am happy about because a lot of times I worked like last minute (laughing). But unfortunately we don't get much feedback specifically on the assignment (P10 slightly nodding). I did get some, but it was like 'Yeah, this point was good, this point was good, this point was good.', but nothing like 'Ok, you could have done better on this point or next time try to improve this and that.'. There is no such feedback ever for me. I don't know if it would work if I just contact the teacher and ask, but like normally it's just the grade in the Korppi system and that's it. Yeah.
P10	Right. I think on a similar note probably. Two assignments I thoroughly I enjoyed was the same thing, writing the Leadership Philosophy (P9 nodding), in fact the one for T6 is something I enjoyed much more than writing the Pedagogical Leadership philosophy (P9 in agreement). (laughing)
P9	Oh, I am not done with that. (laughing)



P10	<p>And then I also enjoyed the part two of the assignment, the one we wrote on ethics related to. So, I wrote one on Ubuntu, which I felt I kind of poured myself into quite a bit, which was a very beautiful experience to write. I think those feedbacks that came were very precise, elaborate, very clear. Especially for this particular course. I think the one I was kind of disappointed with was, although it was a grade 5, the feedback I got was 'You know what, you got a big fat 5' and I was very unhappy (laughing) hearing that statement because for me it's no longer about grades so much (P9 nodding). I wrote an actually guidebook for teachers for intercultural competence in schools in Finland and I have done a lot of work to actually write that, but what came back was just a grade. And that was kind of very disappointing, but I think this assignment was also assigned to the lady who kind of coordinates also the schools in Jyväskylä. But again, what I heard... I asked can I get some feedback from like how useful (P9: Yeah.) it is as a tool or something in that sense. Sadly I don't think she is very like motivated about what she does. I haven't heard anything from her, so. These were kind of like, a bit too disappointing. (laughing)</p>
Interviewer	<p>And now you mentioned because you mentioned the Leadership Philosophy and the Pedagogical Leadership - why do you think the difference is so high between enjoying what you were doing. Do you have any explanation for that?</p>
P10	<p>Hm, I think this was more like... the Pedagogical one was still very more academically oriented, I felt in that sense. Yes, we are still solving a case, we were taking a case study, we were writing something about it, but... the one I wrote for T6's course was, because I am also very spiritually inclined in many ways, there was a lot I was able to draw from that aspect and those experiences to kind of add to my Leadership Philosophy and I felt that was more true, it was more just, it was... it was more me in so many ways. This was like a good student work and that was like a real me work (smiling). So probably that's the difference.</p>
P9	<p>I started with the Pedagogical Leadership one and I kinda like wrote down my thoughts on what I wanna write about in that part.</p>
P10	<p>Yeah.</p>
P9	<p>With me also, it doesn't feel the same like Leadership Philosophy we had to write because that Leadership Philosophy was really just me and like what kind of leader I would like to be but the other one we have to write now is more like which context would you work in and how would you change things, what are the goals etc. etc. I do have some of that experiences in (student organisation), but just looking at my studies, I wouldn't really know what to write about because we never talked about these things really thoroughly. There were some like hints like with the reform class with T7, where we had (P10 nodding) to think about these things and set goals and stuff like that, but doing that from your own perspective and like coming up with a context where you would be working in that and you are working in an assignment with that, is kinda harder. More difficult. Because for me it feels unrealistic at the moment at least. I don't know.</p>
P10	<p>(nodding) Yeah, I think to kind of add to that. Both the reform-based assignments, I think what really came out in the writing was from my own experience of doing school</p>

	<p>reforms (P9 nodding) back in (home country) than the actual studies, I felt. Because many times when I gave certain suggestions, the team members were like 'What, will that work?' But I actually have seen it work. And it's so hard to logically convince someone that 'No, no, no, this works in real life, I have seen it change students lives.' So, I think that's very true like your... if you have actually engaged in those kind of activities, I feel there is a lot more you can draw from this programme than, actually that programme doesn't build you so much to be (P9 nodding) ready in so many ways.</p>
P9	Exactly.
P10	Yeah.
Interviewer	Ok, you addressed already shortly group work.
P10	Yeah.
Interviewer	<p>So, we gonna go into that now. And basically, here at JYU there is quite a lot of group work, I would say (P9 and 10 nodding) compared to your home environment, I am not sure about that, but we can talk about that. It's a similar question now. How do you approach such given assignments. So, group work assignments. Could you give an example of an assignment you were pleased with and one you were disappointed with and why.</p>
P10	Ok. (pointing to P9)
P9	<p>Yeah, as I said earlier. In (home country P9), a lot of times we have the option of giving a presentation during group work or do an assignment, at least the programme I studied in. So, I tended to not do that. If I had to do it, yeah. There weren't that many, maybe five max in the whole programme. So, here it started off like 'Oh my god, so much group work. Can I deal with it?' because I wasn't used to it. And I feel like we had a lot of group work in the beginning and it got less and less and less 'til now. How do I approach it normally? I would just start meeting up with the people and talking about the assignments, what we have to do, starting to brainstorm, what are the ideas and then going deeper and then once you what you want work on, figure out who does what for next time you meet for example. Like, who takes care of what, coming back together and exchanging ideas and so on. One that I was pleased with, was the last one we had in T7's class. Maybe because we all knew each other quite well already (P10 smiling) and we had worked with each other separately, not in that group constellation yet, but separately at least. And we just enjoyed coming together and like working and at the time chatting about other stuff. One that is... I don't know if I was disappointed with it, but it is till in my mind. It was the first one for T7's class that we had in the first semester. I don't remember... we were like five or six people. I don't remember completely, but.. The work itself, I wasn't really happy with it because I don't know, we didn't know each other and then people came late, like I am a person who is always on time, so I didn't like that. And then there was one person who like took over the whole group at one point. She came late and after half an hour, she was like 'Ok, we are gonna do this, you do this, you this, you do this.' I was like 'Ähm, excuse me, we are a group, we should be figuring this out together.' So, I didn't feel very comfortable, but I learned from it and we like moved on from there. We still</p>

	delivered a good presentation at the end, so that was fine. But the starting wasn't that well. Yeah.
P10	Ok, group work. (laughing) I think in my previous studies the group work were all related to practical things. So, that was very different from like doing an academic project. The challenges were plenty. So, we had to figure out things, we had to find solutions, we had to deliver things. There was no scope for any kind of excuses, dropping out. There was no space for any superficiality, we had to know each other, we had to fight it out, we had to do things together, which was very real and very beautiful for me in many ways. Here I felt the group works were very comfortable (smiling, slightly laughing) in the sense that nobody goes beyond a level of their comfort. (P9 nodding) They always continue to stay in their comfort zones in group work. For me that's not group work. Because I think here the aim is 'Let's just get this assignment done. Let's do it well.' (P9 nodding) Group works are an opportunity to learn something about each other and I think the space for that drastically decreased because the focus was so much on just delivering a final assignment (P9 nodding), which was <i>disheartening</i> for me because, again, I told you this is a huge change for me, a huge opening and I would have wanted to engage more, more deeply with people, spent time, or even spent informal time together before you actually do something in a formal setting. It becomes so critical to do both parallelly. I think the group works I was really disappointed with, was the first one (pointing to P9) like she was mentioning and the last one. I had a really tough group to work with at the end of the year and it was my last teamwork and I was hoping that, I just wanted to do it well and just enjoy completely, but it went completely the other way because somebody was sick, somebody was upset, somebody was confused and there was a lot pep talk that I had to do to bring people together before the actual presentation in front of the professor. Because it becomes very evident when you are not in sync with each other. (P9 agreeing) No matter how beautifully you might present a project, if you are not mentally in sync with each other, it is obvious. So, I think I had to throw aside any personal judgements inside and just see how to bring the group together. So, it was very challenging in that way, the last project. The first project again was very vague for me, I was very excited because it was the first one and again, I had somebody from some other cohort, one exchange student and then somebody...
Interviewer	Very different group of people...
P10	There was somebody mocking me constantly during the group works (P9 looking astonished) and...
Interviewer	What do you mean 'mocking'?
P10	Mocking in terms of language, sarcasm like slight phrases.
P9	Huh.

P10	It was a bit disappointing, but again... I did certain group exercises with that group again (slightly laughing), we did certain drama exercises and they thought I am weird, I am silly, I am stupid. Whatever. Finally, the project turned out well and I think contributed a lot to, I think these extra things we did together (P9 nodding) as well. I called them for meal, so that... 'Let's just spent time and eat together and do something.' and for me, yeah, I think in those ways. What did I enjoy very much? None, really. I won't say 'Wow, it was...' The wow-factor was missing for most group works considering that that's something I am most look forward to. That didn't happen through the entire two years. (P9 nodding). Yeah.
Interviewer	Sad.
P10	(laughing)
Interviewer	So, we have talked now a little bit about presenting results in group, what about writing together. Have you had any challenges, good end results, bad end results there due to certain reasons?
P9	I think the results were always good in the end, but the process getting there wasn't so easy. Especially, when you work with exchange students. They don't know APA style at all and...
Interviewer	So, lack of academic writing skills.
P9	Yeah... and even though you kinda share the websites with them like 'You can check out things here, how it works, lalala.' They still don't get it, they still don't do it right and then you have to go through the whole thing to make it look right. And I think language was also at times the problem like lots of mistakes, grammar, wording,... understanding also like I worked with some Finnish students. I remember this one group work, not (?) Finnish students in general, but it was like me, another (nationality of the student referring to own nationality) and I think two Finns, something like that. And the Finnish girl's like... I think they wrote in a very like Finnish/English way, which I understood, but I knew like it was tough to understand for others maybe. So, it took us a lot of time to go through the whole thing and like make it look nice and to be able to submit it in a way that's ok.
Interviewer	So, different kinds of English language skills.
P9	Yeah.
P10	I am sorry, what was the question again.
P9	The writing.
P10	The academic writing, write together.
Interviewer	... in a group.
P10	Hm, I think generally it goes well, but I think the challenge is often in just building that coherence in that text (P9 nodding). Everybody in their own part make a lot of sense,

	<p>just tying it up together, it takes one individual to kind of fix those gaps or the loops and also sometimes I found that in group works, they are like 'I have written my part, I have written my part.' (all laughing) I find that very odd, it's like a school student kind of thing. 'I did mine.' So, I think a little more maturity in that way that it's not about my part or your part (P9 nodding), but read through the whole assignment three to four times and see how it's sounding (P9 nodding), how it's resonating with your thoughts, your ideas. And sometimes I saw like, I felt a lack of involvement with what was being written sometimes. Towards the end a lot of got copy-paste work from previous assignments like 'I have already written that there, let me just put it here.' You put it there, absolutely sensible thing to do, but again build like a network with your previous writings and stuff like that. So, I felt sometimes a lack of maturity, lack of involvement. Generally it went well, generally we could always talk it out and say 'Look, why don't you read and look at this or.' Sometimes technology comes in helpful because you are not saying face to face maybe, but you are making remarks and say 'Something missing here. The other thing should be here.' In your own polite way, you say little things.</p>
P9	True.
Interviewer	Like virtual group work.
P10	Yeah. (laughing) But those help. Sometimes they resolve without the bases, sometimes they resolve with the bases these remarks, but all around alright, fun. Yeah, ok.
Interviewer	You have now shortly addressed that people were copy pasting things.
P10	Yeah, yeah.
Interviewer	Generally I think this is also considered as plagiarism because they are plagiarizing themselves...
P10	(nodding)
Interviewer	... kind of without, if they maybe make the connection and change maybe afterwards utilizing the previous text. But have you experienced in that sense plagiarism at all? Like have you had cases where you realized yourself 'Hey, this is maybe not cited correctly.' or maybe is not written by that person himself. Any experiences about that?
P10	I think sometimes when you read the text and since you know the person, you know it's not their own words (P9 nodding), you do, immediately... something just tells you it's not their words. Yeah, maybe they don't try to paraphrase it so much in their own language, but it's something you can always tell them that it seems too like "ready to go" kind of thing, can you see what to do about it? Or things like that, but also this is an area where I am still learning so. I always re-look two to three times before I suggest or I remark on what someone has written or said. Yeah.
P9	Yeah, similar like thinking about the one assignment again with the two Finnish girls. At one point one of them wrote something, I was like 'This is not your English.' Like

	<p>reading her part and then reading that one section, I was like ‘This is not ok.’ But turned out, she just, she took this sentence from the article, but then only changed single words like looked up synonyms and that, the register didn’t fit, but then I also told her ‘Even though that, like you taking just the idea, you have to indicate it.’ because it wasn’t indicated at all. And I think those were mostly the issues that people didn’t indicate it was taken from another article, that they forgot to like show that’s actually direct quote or even just like correctly citing. (P10 nodding) I think those were the main issues, but we always figured it out. At least with that assignment, we’ve all had read the same articles, so we could like go back together and check again and figure it out.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Ok. I will quote again, her name is Precorari. “Ideally academic support should be constructed around the needs of the students.” So now we look into the support, which is provided for you working academically, writing academically etc., researching. To what extent have you been supported for your academic work here at JYU? Are you satisfied with the support you received? Yes, no and explanation why. So support is related to for example the research methods courses, I think in the beginning we academic reading and writing courses, then individual supervision as well.</p>
P10	<p>So, it’s purely on the academic front you are asking.</p>
Interviewer	<p>Yeah.</p>
P10	<p>Ok, right. I think overall maybe on a grade from one to five, I would put somewhere at three maybe. (P9 slightly nodding) Sadly, well-supported in the sense that if you want to reach out to someone, you are able to talk to them (P9 nodding), ask them. But I think the culture is such that you are always directed back to what you want to do (laughing), how do you want to do it, which is important because it’s ultimately for you to figure out yourself with the challenges that you have. So, relatively you are own your own in a big bay, but there is still the scope to speak to someone or bounce of a thought or a question or something like that. Sorry, you had mentioned something else as well in terms of academic support, you said...</p>
Interviewer	<p>To what extent have you been supported? That was I think a bit what you covered right now.</p>
P10	<p>Yeah, yeah.</p>
Interviewer	<p>And then, are you satisfied with the support you receive and you gave me basically a grade now.</p>
P10	<p>Yeah, I think so. I think also with my thesis work, it has been quite challenging in so many ways because I am working with a professor’s data and it’s not easy. When it’s your own data, there is, I feel, you are able to thread things much faster and much quicker. But here I am trying to make a connection between what I actually studied through the entire two years and what I have as data in hand. And bringing those connections has been quite a challenge. So, I have had a lot of like every time I’ve had a doubt or a confusion, I have been able to go back, talk, get the ideas right,</p>

	something visually and bounce it of. Yeah, I think primarily quite a bit of support I would say.
Interviewer	Ok, do you think the courses offered or aiming to support this work, your thesis work for example.
P10	The courses themselves.
Interviewer	So, we had few research methods courses. I think there were kind of different options where everyone, I think two were mandatory.
P10	Ok, in that sense, ok. I didn't find the research methodology courses so empowering actually. I probably, I think it's been more of my own individual learning and a lot of reading of sample articles and theses that has kind of helped more in that direction. The courses themselves, I don't think built such a strong base, but I would rather say that the academic assignments that we did along the way, has helped more. Yeah, in this direction.
P9	For me like I received a lot of support so far from my thesis supervisor, which I am really satisfied with. In any way. There was a point where I was about to give up and I was like 'You know what, I have to read so much still, I can't start doing my data collection.' Then she like answered within a few minutes or hours and it was like late Sunday evening or something and said '(Name of P9), it's fine. Just start doing it, you will be alright, you will figure it out on the way, blablablab.' So, everything there was, I feel super supported by her. Anything I need, she would always be there. Really great. Other than that, not so much. Like the academic reading and writing I think helped to get into this whole like thinking of writing an academically well text and reading that. The research courses. Of course they gave me some knowledge because I didn't have any research knowledge but I don't remember much of them. I think they helped me a little bit in figuring out what I wanna do with my thesis, but maybe more like in the sense that I had to read myself, like P10 was saying and then figure it out on the way. Ähm, you were saying that it would normally according to that person, it would cater to the individual needs. I don't think that's happening, except for the thesis supervision. In the courses, I mean yes, academic reading and writing, we still looked, like we got individual feedback from the teacher and we looked at how we work. But generally, it was the same for everybody. There was no like looking at 'Ok, what's your background, have you done research before, what's your knowledge in academic reading and writing?' and build upon that. It was more like 'Everybody has to do this.', which I don't think makes sense. I know that some of my classmates said 'This class doesn't help me at all.', others they were kinda lost because as I said their English level wasn't high enough to be able to read a lot and write a lot at the beginning already. So, yeah. So, I think it depends on what you are talking about if you can say you are satisfied or not.
Interviewer	Ok. In previous groups I had, they discussed a bit peer support. So, being supported by other students. Have you experienced that as well? In your academic work.
P10	I think a lot of people who took my help on various occasions, which was nice because I also learned in the process, on some other challenges they were having.

	<p>But I did get articles kind of skimmed through and say 'Do you think it is sounding fine or do you think I should make some changes or can you make some remarks and send it back?' So, I used to do some pre-reading and send it back to a few of our peers. I think, I've helped in some ways, yeah.</p>
P9	<p>For me I think, it was in the sense that I exchanged ideas on assignments we had to do and like how to move forward or what did you do, what was kinda your idea to understand what you were supposed to be doing (P10 slightly nodding) because sometimes it's quite vague, the task and to figure it out. And then I think, it was more on the motivational side (P10 slightly nodding) like talking about how we are doing and how tasks don't get done and we are not motivated and seeing, you are not the only one, which I mean it's not so cool that so many people are demotivated (P10 nodding), but it helps a lot to know you are not the only one who feels that way.</p>
P10	<p>Yeah.</p>
P9	<p>And exchanging your opinions about that, helped me a lot throughout time so far. And yeah, I have also offered some of my assignments to others when they, when I was already done and they weren't done and I had gotten my feedback. I was like 'You can look at mine, if that helps you and moving on with yours.'</p>
Interviewer	<p>You had never had any problems after you have done that because there have been cases in the previous groups, they have talked about it that they gave their assignment to someone else and basically that person copied the style, which has impact on of course the end result.</p>
P9	<p>Yeah, I haven't heard about that but I have only also given it to my close friends. Because, with the others, I don't know. I talk with you (addressing the interviewer) and (friend's name) and (friend's name) a lot about these things, but then with others not so much. It's more superficial 'Hey, how are you doing, how are your assignments doing?' and that's it. I don't know really much like what's going on in everybody else's academic life. So, I trust those people I gave it to. Yeah, I don't know.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So, these are the final thoughts, almost. Because you have addressed in the beginning for example that English language has not necessarily developed further in that sense here or your academic skill set in writing in English. But in ways do you think you have developed as a student academically here at JYU? Is there any development?</p> <p>(long pause)</p>
P10	<p>I think quite a bit for me in the sense that I always had like an inhibition of talking to people from other cultures, especially a large group like this. And I think that got completely wiped away with probably doing, trying to do some workshops or engaging in teamwork or just talking to people. During different things all through the year. I think I looked at those two years more as breaking certain fears, certain limitations, moving out of certain comfort zones for myself. That was my entire focus other than my academic part. So, in those ways I think, I've been able to function more fully as a student. I am not held back myself in any way really all through these two years. So,</p>



	yeah, I think that's a big move. (laughing)
P9	Well, for me it's also been working with people from different backgrounds, people with more diverse backgrounds than I was used to before. And then, yeah doing research, learning that, how to do that, how to prepare it and now learning how to analyse it. And I think also what has changed is that like in (home country P9) I would always only have assignment or either I would have a test at the end of the semester or assignments that would be due throughout the break. So it's like in that space and throughout the semester I was super free, I didn't have anything to do basically because also there was not much homework except of one course that I would always have homework in. And here, it's more like you have to like work on it all the time throughout the semester because sometimes, as you (addressing interviewer) said earlier already, the assignments are due the last day of the course or something like that, which I wasn't used to. Well, I tend to push it back still, but I think I learned more to work on the go and while the course is happening. Yeah.
Interviewer	Ok. We have addressed a bit of like motivational aspects as well and that you (P10) for example were rather disappointed with group works etc. So, we come now the recommendation section. What would you recommend, what would you like to see more. It seems like practical aspects are missing, where you maybe could learn also to be more academically. But what other things come to your mind when you think about the support system here.
P9	There is still something. It is still related to the previous question. I cannot really tell if I improved my academic reading and writing. <i>I guess, I did, but since there is only grades as feedback and no like actual feedback on maybe the outline of the whole article or your language choice, things like that. I don't know.</i> So, I think that's really important to like see how you improve yourself and where you can like improve even more because then looking at the thesis, which is a big project you want to deliver it well, well-written thesis there, it's good to know that already because you write so much throughout the four semesters til you get to your thesis. So, I think that's super important.
P10	Yeah, I think commenting on that. Writing feedback is a skill by itself and I noticed that some professors were absolutely, it used to amaze me, when I got their feedback like 'How are they able to actually do that?', you know read and spot out certain things and write such a bit, especially I think for two particular assignments, the feedback that came, was very beautifully written, in almost like a letter to the person, very individualized (P9 nodding). These are mostly pedagogy related courses, all my specialization. And both of these came these course, not the core leadership courses that we worked on. So, I think that's something I wanted to add and I think in terms of, yeah developing as a student, definitely I think research skills have gone up one scale in my understanding, in my ability to write. I wrote a book chapter during the summer, so that's been in place. There has been a spurt in that I would surely say. I am not sure how it's happen or because of what's happen, maybe because of engaging is so many essay writings, it's then end result of that, but I gain, as a teacher I know that, as a language teacher I know it's very hard to give feedback on your writing skills (P9 nodding), when you ever try to comment on somebody's writing, I don't know, it's

	<p>simply so hard to just write a good feedback. So, when you do get a good feedback, you know that 'Wow, this lady or this professor knows how to word it (P9 nodding) the right way.'. Yeah.</p>
P9	<p>Something else I was thinking about, is either adjust the courses specifically, academic reading and writing and the research courses more towards the students' needs looking at what are the student's backgrounds, where are they coming from. Adjusting that in a way more. Or making sure that students that get accepted to the programme have sort of s same level of background, so that you can work together with that 'cause I don't think it worked out for us like (P10 nodding) the academic reading and writing course for example, I was put in together with somebody and we were supposed to read each other's text and give feedback. I barely got anything, I had a lot to comment on hers (P10 nodding), specifically on the English language, which yes, it helped her probably a lot and helped me in learning more, giving feedback for example, but her... like it didn't help me in any way to move forward with my text because she couldn't comment really much on my text. So, ähm yeah, that's something that could be taken in consideration.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So, looking more into the needs of the students, what is pre-existing...</p>
P9	<p>Yeah.</p>
Interviewer	<p>... could help further.</p>
P10	<p>I think one other recommendation I would have, is... it's not like Finland is devoid of challenges in the education system (P9 nodding), there are plenty that can be looked at and we could look at one real problem that exists locally and actually as a leadership cohort take that as a case study (P9 slightly nodding) instead of taking something from your own imagination...</p>
P9	<p>That's a good idea.</p>
P10	<p>... or something from your previous experiences.</p>
Interviewer	<p>So, like a project.</p>
P10	<p>Yeah, I think it actually tests to some extent the openness, the stress levels that we talk about in this education system. We could take one real problem and develop something as a group and I feel that would be far far more satisfying individually and even for the faculty (P9 nodding) itself. You actually contribute something.</p>
P9	<p>Yeah.</p>
P10	<p>While you are here.</p>
P9	<p>It's not just for the sake of doing it.</p>
P10	<p>You not just got a degree and left, you have done something more. This could be done at a playgroup level, a school level or even at the university level. Various things,...</p>

Interviewer	There are many options.
P10	Many, many options that I see.
P9	What I also think is missing a lot, is like having spaces to talk about how you are doing with the professors or with the coordinators. I think it happened quite a lot in the beginning like first, maybe even second semester, but since then (P10 slightly nodding), I barely saw them, only for classes that we had. And I feel like there was a lot going on with different people and different stages like people being sick, people feeling lonely, people being demotivated like me and there was never space to share that except for with my friends. And also something, I don't feel was taken into consideration is the feedback that we have given like especially, if you remember the first semester we sat down with them (P10 nodding) and gave a lot of feedback, I haven't seen that happening anywhere and then talking to the new cohort, there was the exact same thing again and then I am wondering, why do we give feedback to improve it, so other people have a better experience if it's not taken into consideration at all.
Interviewer	In one of the previous focus groups, I had a student from the education programme and what they do, is they give weekly feedback. They have a setup forum in Optima where they all share their thoughts on what they have learned, what could be better, what is their current status. It is up to them what they write there, it's like a learning diary log kind of style and what is interesting, you can choose whether you want to share it with all or if you just want to share with, I think it is the coordinators or then there are options of commenting as well. So, it's bit like a virtual learning space in that sense, which I think hasn't been addressed in our programme. (P10 nodding for agreeing, P9 shaking head for saying 'no'). Because yesterday I had a Educational Leadership and an Education student. So, that came up and the Educational Leadership was quite fond of that idea...
P9	Yeah.
Interviewer	... to share actually what's going on as a community building kind of activity as well. So you know 'Ok, they have learned this and that or they do that course. I haven't thought about taking that course, but it sounds really interesting.'
P9	I like that. It's a good idea.
P10	Also, I think the interaction between both the cohorts (P9: Yeah), the Education and the Educational Leadership cohort kind of, initially it was there, but then (making a fading sound). It just kind of disintegrated. Sorry, I cut you.
P9	It's ok, it's fine, it's fine. I like the idea, too because after the second semester, you barely see people 'cause you are almost with the compulsory courses and everybody just takes their specialization courses and everything. So, I think it is really good to like know also what's going on with others 'cause for some reason we don't manage to meet up really because everybody is just busy with thesis and classes and what not. So, that would be a good opportunity to still be in contact on some level and know what's happening. Yeah.

Interviewer	Ok, last question. We have actually talked about this already a bit but, what did you feel was the most important thing we have talked in this whole session now and is there anything you would like me to add to ask people.
P9	So many things. (Short pause) I think for me it's the support like what support do you get from the university, what other support do you have maybe from your cohort. Things like that. Because I think it's really important to have some sort of support 'cause otherwise... like me, like if I didn't have you guys to talk about what's going on, like I mean I still have other friends who are not here who I talk to about it, but they don't understand it in the way that it is for me. So, I think that's the most important for me 'cause otherwise everything else would have been super bad for me I think. Yeah.
P10	I don't know really, I found all the questions quite relevant and important. I can't really decide. It's just the important thing but I think the recommendations are like critical things because it is gonna take years before that actually happens (laughing). Or you can do it like this, in a jiffy. You could make it happen for the next cohort. It's up to the institution in so many ways.
Interviewer	Ok, the first group I asked that question, what they would like to be added, I have continued asking in every group. And the question was: Are you finishing your thesis in time?
P9	No
Interviewer	What's in time first for you. For you (addressing P9) it would be two years, right? So, finishing now.
P9	Yeah.
Interviewer	But you (addressing P10) took one semester off, you mentioned in the beginning, so you actually...
P10	For my internship.
Interviewer	Yeah. So, actually your normal study time is extended then.
P10	Äh, but I am trying to finish my thesis by this month's end. I should be done.
Interviewer	So, everything fine.
P10	Yeah. (laughing)
Interviewer	Very good. Thank you, that's it.