

A COLLECTIVE FRAMEWORK FOR SUPERVISION OF STUDENT THESIS – A FINNISH PILOT PROJECT

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BACKGROUND

The pilot project was carried out in Finland at Arcada University of Applied Sciences, Department of Health and Welfare at a Bachelor degree level. The thesis plays a significant role as part of the students' learning processes and for completing the degree. A difficulty to initiate and complete the thesis is identified as a crucial reason for prolonged studies and is one of the obstacles for graduating. Therefore, guidance of theses is a significant process in higher education. As shown in several studies, intensified and structured supervision is a means to support the students' thesis processes and graduation (Kalima 2011).

METHODS

A new model for supervision, the pedagogic intervention, was developed and evaluated during the academic year 2011-2012. The model consisted of a coaching group for teacher support and theses in tutorials with 6-8 students. The tutorials entailed a structured three phase thesis process, a pedagogical agreement between students and teachers and group coaching support for the teachers involved in the project. A total of eight student groups from seven degree programs and eleven teachers participated in the project. The new model was evaluated through narratives (teachers), focus group discussions (teachers and students) and ordinary course evaluation (students).

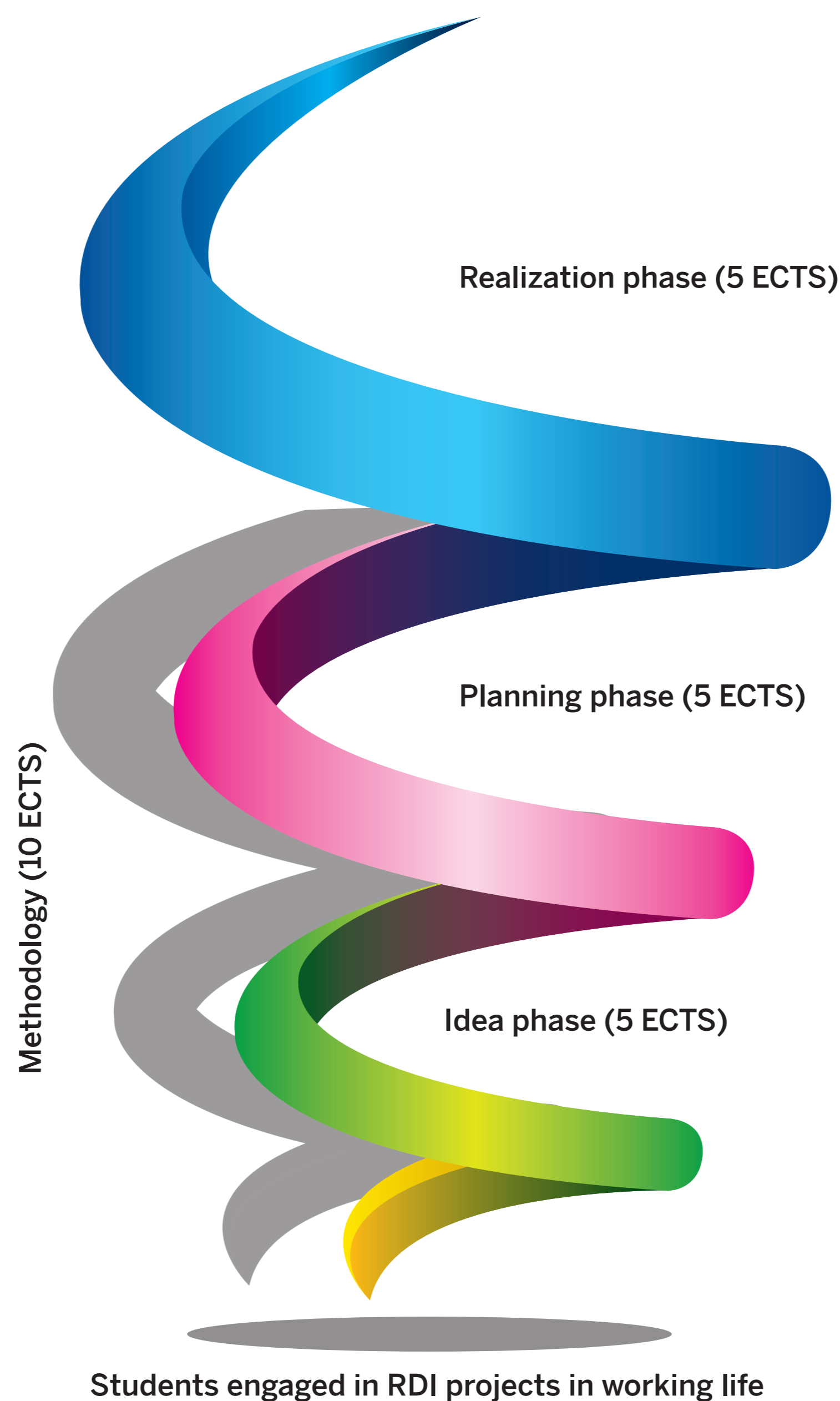
THE AIMS OF THE PILOT PROJECT WERE

- 1) to assemble students into tutorials guiding and empowering them into completing their theses and thereby increase the students turnover,
- 2) to utilize peer tutoring and group commitment,
- 3) to involve students into RDI projects,
- 4) to reduce teachers' workload.

THE PROCESS IN STUDENT GROUPS WITH THREE PHASES

METHODOLOGY COURSE INCLUDED

To support the learning process the students take part in a Methodology course (10 ECTS). Theoretical perspectives concretize in the student's own research process. The methodology course strive to strengthen research and development competence through focusing on different phases of the research process.



RESULTS

- A new model for supervision of theses at a Bachelor degree level was developed. The three phases in the model, all of them registered separately, have given the process a structure that helps the student to complete their theses.
- Results show that student turnover has increased.
- Teachers workload has still not been reduced but some overlappings have been avoided.
- With the collective learning process in focus the development of the group supervision will continue.
- New initiative to create models for research projects involving working life and student groups have been developed.

CONCLUSION

A process that is supported by the supervisor and the coach has the potential to succeed in its goal. Group supervision of bachelor theses in professional higher education was found to be an effective and goal directed method for supporting an effective thesis project. The method has been implemented in Arcada and further research will investigate the benefits of two supervisors in each student group.

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