The dynamics of academic writing development in postgraduate writing group interaction

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Writing groups have been identified as an effective means to support postgraduate students' development as academic writers. Often such groups are facilitated by advisors at university writing centres. Studies on reported and observed interaction in these groups suggest that students formulate tacit assumptions and draw on various types of normative knowledge (e.g. Mochizuki & Starfield, 2021). However, there is little information on *how* this knowledge is made relevant and used to generate intersubjective understanding and support writing development. The aim of this paper is therefore to explore the dynamics of introducing and using norms and concepts of academic writing when solving writing problems. The study takes a socio-cultural perspective and draws on the notion of mediational tools. Mediational tools objectify culturally developed knowledge as they are interpreted and used in interaction (Wittek et al., 2017), e.g. when the concept of 'topic sentence' is used in the group interaction to solve a specific writing issue. The study investigates how writing group participants jointly mobilize different sets of knowledge when identifying and negotiating writing problems in their own or peers' texts.

The data consist of recordings of writing group meetings collected over eight weeks. The group comprised six masters students from humanities, social sciences and natural sciences departments who used English as an additional language, and two facilitators at a Swedish university. The analysis focuses on episodes in which participants introduce and use knowledge of research-based writing (e.g. identifying topic sentences, distinguishing between aims and objectives). The results reveal that participants negotiate various levels of abstract and situated knowledge. Students do not only test tacit assumptions about their own writing projects, but also draw on complex techniques to verify different types of knowledge.

References

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