



## Dialogic possibilities of online supervision

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### **Abstract**

*When schools locked down owing to the spread of COVID-19, Danish upper secondary school students worked on the major written assignment that completes their studies. This assignment is interdisciplinary, and students receive up to twenty hours of supervision from two teachers. This year, supervision was reorganised into a virtual format. This article explores how and in what ways students benefited from this reorganisation. This article is based on a mixed-methods design that includes quantitative and qualitative data and investigates how various online supervision formats support dialogic interaction. This article focuses on the student's experience of supervision. It finds that all the formats we investigated offer the opportunity for dialogue during supervision, but their potential varies significantly. Some formats seem to have great potential for supporting students' academic development, whereas others support their psychosocial development. We conclude by addressing the importance of choosing the online format suited to a given purpose and recommend that supervisors be aware of the didactic purposes of the various formats.*

**Keywords:** *Supervision, Online, dialogue, Corona, upper secondary school*

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### **Introduction**

In recent years, research into higher education has increasingly focused on using digital media for supervising and providing feedback on student assignments. When the spread of COVID-19 forced schools to close in the spring of 2020, students in Danish upper secondary schools were about to begin writing the major written assignments that complete their studies. These assignments are interdisciplinary, and students receive supervision from two teachers. This situation may be understood as a natural experiment (Mutch, 2020) related to digital supervision at educational levels other than higher education, with the opportunity to learn how and in what ways students may benefit from digital technologies in their supervision. In another study, Bang-Larsen and Qvortrup (2021) show that the development of the supervision of these assignments displayed great variety regarding both the formats of online supervision (e.g., synchronous/asynchronous, audio-or video-based/written) and the use of technologies (e.g., email, SoMe, conferencing systems). Previous studies suggest that online supervision formats may help cement a dialogue-oriented, process-oriented, and trusting relationship. This is especially true for text-based feedback, where the virtual tools offer insight into the students' writing process (Suler, 2004; Kumar &

Johnson, 2019; Bengtson, 2015). Based on Bang-Larsen and Qvortrup's work (2021), it seems that the perspectives on online supervision are complex, owing to students' and teachers' different ideas about the character of the aims of supervision and their different qualifications for facilitating and participating in online supervision processes.

This article takes a Bakhtinian perspective on communication to grasp the dialogical potential of online supervision. We were curious about whether and how various digital formats and technologies support dialogical interaction during academic supervision and how such dialogical interaction orients the development of knowledge. In April 2020, that is, in the middle of the school closures, we collected quantitative and qualitative data to investigate students' supervision and knowledge development during school closures. Our research question is, *How does dialogical interaction in various formats of online supervision support upper secondary students' development of knowledge and writing processes?*

This article presents new understandings of online supervision at upper secondary schools focusing on the supervision dialogue. Online supervision during lockdown 2020 is a case useful for expanding and nuancing our understanding of how digital formats and technologies support supervision in general. This case is of interest since online supervision was not undertaken solely by students and teachers who have special reasons or good qualifications for completing their supervision online.

### *The Danish upper secondary school*

There are seven upper secondary educational programmes in Denmark, all subsidised by the state. All the programmes require students to have completed nine years of compulsory schooling. Three of them lead to an Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate,<sup>1</sup> which qualifies students to apply to universities and university colleges. These have various academic focuses. The STX programme<sup>1</sup> is the oldest, largest, and most common. It comprises a broad range of disciplines in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. The HHX programme<sup>2</sup> focuses on business and economics, and the HTX programme<sup>3</sup> focuses on technology.

Students have to complete three major written assignments throughout Danish upper secondary education. When schools were closed because of COVID-19, most of the oldest students were beginning or supposed to begin writing their last major assignment, called the Specialised Study Project (SRP)<sup>4</sup> at STX and Multi-Subject Coursework (SOP)<sup>5</sup> at HHX and HTX. These assignments are independent, interdisciplinary assignments, and the students receive supervision from the involved teachers.<sup>6</sup> The supervisors guide the students in finding material, choosing analysis methods, defining their topic, and making a thesis statement. The supervisors set the final exam paper based on the thesis statement, and the student then has 50 hours to write their assignment, consisting of 15 to 20 standard pages. The assignment is defended orally, and the student receives a mark for their work. The mark has a weight of 2 on the students' final upper secondary school diploma. Both students and teachers describe the SRP/SOP assignments as very important or even the crowning work of the 3-year upper secondary school programme.

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<sup>1</sup> STX is the abbreviation for the Danish wording for 'Higher General Examination'

<sup>2</sup> HHX is the abbreviation for the Danish wording for 'Higher Commercial Examination'.

<sup>3</sup> HTX is the abbreviation for the Danish wording for 'Higher Technical Examination'

<sup>4</sup> SRP is the abbreviation for the Danish wording for 'Specialised Study Project'.

<sup>5</sup> SOP is the abbreviation for the Danish wording for 'Multi-Subject Coursework'.

<sup>6</sup> See the curriculum for the Specialised Study Project (<https://www.uvm.dk/-/media/filer/uvm/gym-laereplaner-2017/stx/studieretningsprojektet-stx-august-2017-ua.pdf>) and for the Multi-Subject Coursework, HHX (<https://www.uvm.dk/-/media/filer/uvm/gym-laereplaner-2017/hhx/studieomraadet-hhx-august-2017-ua.pdf>) and HTX (<https://www.uvm.dk/-/media/filer/uvm/gym-laereplaner-2017/hhx/studieomraadet-hhx-august-2017-ua.pdf>).

### *Online supervision*

A lot of research on supervision and online supervision has been carried out over the past 20 years (Pearson, 2005; Wichmann-Hansen et al., 2007; Bjørndal, 2008; Maxwell & Smyth, 2011; Bastalich, 2017). Many different understandings seem to be attached to the term 'supervision' (Skagen, 2013), sharing the core premise that 'supervision is the key to both quality and efficiency' (Bastalich, 2017, p. 1145). Handal and Lauvås underline that most of what we understand as doctoral supervision takes place in the form of a conversation between supervisors and students, which can vary from formal and planned meetings with a set agenda to more informal and spontaneous talks in the hallway or classroom (Handal & Lauvås, 2011, p. 101). Research identifies various understandings of how the interaction between supervisor and student may support student development and facilitate learning (Brown & Atkins, 1988; Delamont et al., 1998; Lee, 2008). Discrepancies in the understanding concern the role of the supervisor and the relationship between supervisor and student. The tension between students 'dependence on' and 'independence from' their supervisors (Lee, 2008, p. 277) is particularly addressed. This tension calls for reflection on 'the degree of direction and intervention necessary to facilitate independent learning' (Benmore, 2014, p. 13). Bjørndal addresses the powerful role of the supervisor and investigates supervision as participating in a community of practice (Bjørndal, 2008).

This study presents research on the dialogue in *online* supervision of students' written assignments. The dialogue is the part of the supervision meeting that enables the student and the supervisors to engage in and shape the meeting and the subject matter at hand (Bengtsen, 2016, p. 18). Wisker states that the supervisory dialogues can be described as a "learning conversation" and a form of "collaborative problem-solving" (Bengtsen, 2016; Wisker, 2012, p. 190). Our investigation is positioned in a didactic tradition that describes academic supervision as an activity in which students, as learners, develop their abilities by receiving feedback on their work (Boud & Lee, 2005; Emilsson & Johnsson, 2007; Walker & Thomson, 2010). Within the literature on supervision, it is a dominant understanding that learning is a linear process where the student strives for greater independence (Bastalich, 2017; Gurr, 2010). Research stresses the importance of feedback, understood as 'information provided by an agent (...) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding' (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81) and thereby improving this performance (Ives & Rowley, 2005; Johnson et al., 2000; Lee et al., 2008). Based on a synthesis of the evidence of feedback, Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that feedback may be given at four levels: task (information concerning how well a task is carried out); process (feedback concerning the processes underlying tasks, or relating and extending tasks, including students' strategies for error detection); self-regulation (feedback addressing the way students monitor, direct and regulate actions towards a learning goal) and the self (feedback concerning personal aspects).

The close bond between feedback and student writing is well documented in the New Literacy Studies which focus on the development of writing in a social context (Barton, 2007; Gee, 2012; Ivanic, 1998) and direct attention to writing as enculturation (Sommers & Saltz, 2004). In Denmark, this field is informed by research on students' writing skills development in upper secondary school (Krogh & Jakobsen, 2016). In the field of supervision, there has been increased interest in the role of academic socialisation and enculturation (Johnson et al., 2000; Pearson & Brew, 2002). In Scandinavia, recent studies proposed a dialogical framework for researching and supervising, focusing on how voices and dialogue influence the supervision process (Dysthe et al., 2006; Dysthe, 2002). 'Dialogism is important because I see the co-construction of knowledge as essential to communication processes generally and the supervision process in particular' (Dysthe, 2002, p. 519).

In the research into supervision in higher education, we find an increasing focus on online mentoring, defined as 'a developmental relationship between a more experienced individual and a less experienced protégé that is embedded within the career context and that primarily uses online media'

(Kumar & Johnson, 2019, p. 61). The field is nurtured by the research on face-to-face supervision and feedback. Online supervision is typically recognised as benefiting students from a great distance. Furthermore, studies claim there is significant potential for students in using screen sharing when giving feedback on written texts (Kumar et al., 2017; Erichsen, 2014). When it comes to dialogue in online supervision, there is a gap in knowledge. The field has been marked by an understanding of 'online dialogue as being a poorer and less authentic substitute for the face-to-face encounter' (Bengtsen & Jensen, 2015, p. 2).

Nevertheless, recent studies emphasise that online supervision may contribute to the development of students' writing when dialogue is executed with close attention to the qualities of the various online formats (Kumar et al., 2017; Doyle et al., 2016). Key to this is an awareness of how online supervision demands another understanding of *presence* (Bengtsen & Jensen, 2015). For instance, an awareness of tone and voice quality is of great significance if the online format does not give access to eye contact or gestures. Furthermore, the difference between synchronicity and asynchronicity is discussed. Online supervision demands an awareness of when you meet, write and respond, and the culture varies in different formats. Also, research indicate, that students benefit from new possibilities for communication and feedback in different online formats, for instance flexibility in time and place (Suler, 2004).

The affordances of online supervision demand that attention is paid to the role of the supervisors, which is as complex as the dialogue during face-to-face supervision: 'The supervisor is providing learning, advising, encouraging, promoting, and modeling, that is often boundaryless' (Bierema & Merriam, 2002, p. 214). New online relations and a different understanding of presence in online environments mean that students' requests for feedback may differ from face-to-face supervision. Studies of students' perceptions of online supervision stress the importance of the relationship between students and supervisors and highlight the importance of the students sensing the supervisor's interest and personal response (Rademaker, 2016).

The previous foci on online supervision raise the question of whether feedback in an online setting demands a different understanding of feedback, depending on the format used for supervision. Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that feedback directed to the student's subjectivity (e.g., 'You are a great student.' and 'That's an intelligent response, well done.') is often too unrelated to performance to have a positive effect on students' work. However, a number of studies show that students' self-efficacy or belief in their own abilities may be challenged when it comes to online distance learning. Tladi (2017) notes the need to distinguish between various types of self-efficacy: self-efficacy related to remote learning, self-efficacy related to self-regulated learning, and self-efficacy related to computer and online technologies. Al Fadda (2019) presents a similar focus, based on a demonstration of a statistically significant relation between belief in one's abilities and inner goal orientation, and speaks of self-efficacy as a motivating target when teaching takes place from a distance. Chung (2015) finds a connection between a belief in one's abilities and the use of self-regulated learning strategies in distance education. Also, Wang, Peng, Huang, Hou, and Wang (2008) found a correlation between belief in one's abilities, learning strategies, and learning outcomes among students participating in distance education. Peck, Stefaniak, and Shah (2018) find that belief in one's abilities, effort regulation, and peer learning correlate to distance education retention. These results may indicate that complimentary feedback at the level of the student's subjectivity may be particularly important in the context of online writing assignments, where building self-confidence and self-efficacy is crucial for self-regulation and retention.

The research on the online supervision of written assignments has had a limited focus on the way different digital technologies used in supervision influence the dialogue and the feedback, although Bengtsen and Jensen stress that 'different formats influence the conditions for supervision' (Bengtsen &

Jensen, 2015, p. 17). Furthermore, online supervision seems to be investigated primarily in higher education. Thus, we know little about how online assignments are supervised and developed in upper secondary schools, on which this study aims to shed light.

## Theoretical framework

This section presents our understanding of supervision within a didactic framework. We first present our understanding of teaching and didactics, and next, we present our understanding of dialogue and our framework for investigating dialogue during online supervision. Combining these allowed us to shed light on the changes in online supervision, both in terms of micro-processes in dialogues between teachers and students, as they are facilitated and negotiated by digital media, and macro-processes linked to new conditions in teaching and supervision.

This project is based on a communicative approach to teaching and didactics, which considers that the educational system is constantly changing (at different paces) (Christensen et al., 2018). These changes may be due to globalisation and new agendas in transnational education policies, new forms of knowledge, and/or changes in our understanding of what education is and what it should aim to be (Qvortrup, 2018). However, the changes may also happen due to the transition to online settings. Previous research into online, distance education, and teaching indicates that changing physical and social setting supports certain forms of production and organisation (e.g., Bundsgaard 2005), just as new positions and identities are established among students and teachers (e.g., Hasse & Andersen, 2012). This embraces both mental and social phenomena (Asplund et al., 2018; Ito et al., 2014). One may say that these changes challenge the still unchallenged legitimacy of curricula and disciplines (Krogh, 2003, 2006), as they 'force subjects to develop a pronounced and continuous readiness for change' (Ongstad, 2006, p. 28). Thus, the changes force the repeated rethinking of didactics in a broader sense. We suggest that this rethinking occurs at a programmatic level through repeated curricular developments at the planning level. The teacher develops new teaching content and forms based on the didactic purpose (Qvortrup, 2018). Furthermore, this rethinking takes place in didactic practice, where the new content, the new forms of teaching, and the changed didactic purposes are negotiated between the school, teachers, and students. This is captured by the following model of an analysis of didactic events (Figure 1), suggested by Christensen et al. (2014), and has been further developed by Qvortrup et al. (2017) and Qvortrup (2020a).

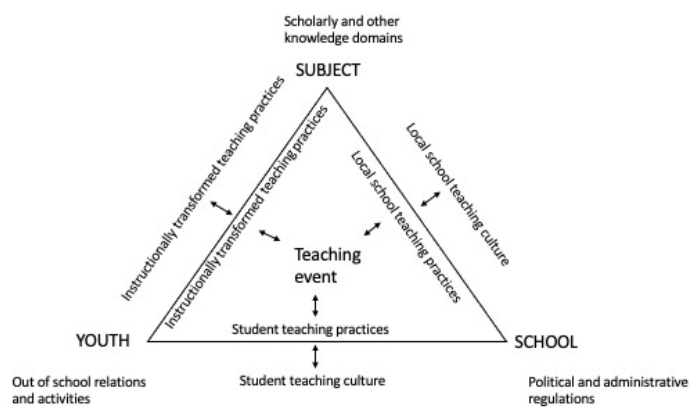


Figure 1: Model of analysis of the didactic event in teaching (after Christensen, 2021)

The didactic negotiations are understood as social events where teachers and students interact under the conditions of a given situation (e.g., in our case, the conditions associated with the Covid-19

pandemic). Events refer to observable teaching situations (Christensen et al., 2014), and the model shows how such events reflect practices and cultures related to students, teachers, and schools. Practices are understood as ways of doing or participating in teaching. Practices refer to cultural norms, values, attitudes, and social relations and cannot be directly observed in a specific situation. Instead practices may be understood through an analysis of recurring approaches, techniques, and patterns that make sense of events and that also establish the limits of what is legitimate and recognisable (ibid.). In addition to referencing norms, values, attitudes, and social relations, cultures capture the fundamental assumptions that exist among and are created by the actors but are also framed by technologies, materials, and physical frameworks (ibid.). According to Ongstad, the didactic negotiation is 'triadic in its distinction between, and linking, the form, content, and use of the text or utterance' (Ongstad, 2013, p. 34). In didactic terms, these are the three essential questions: 'What should be taught (content)?', 'How should this content be presented (form)?' and 'Why/for what purpose (function/use)?' To capture the changes, Ongstad (2013) also adds the two categories of time and place: 'Kronotop, understood as physical time-and-place, [...] becomes an inevitable and always present and silent context' (Ongstad, 2013, p. 35). Subjects, education, and teaching, that is didactics, must 'always relate to five basic aspects that are all woven into each other, namely form, content, use, time and place' (Ongstad, 2013, p. 35).

The theoretical framework that informs our narrative analysis is based on Bakhtin's theories of dialogue and communication (Bakhtin, 1986). Within this framework, we investigate the dialogical potential of online supervision. Understanding supervision as a communicative activity means that the supervisees learn through their interaction with their supervisors. Given this, we argue that Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism seem highly significant. The term 'dialogism' refers to Bakhtin's theories of dialogue, where dialogism is understood as "a name for a bundle, or combination, of theoretical and epistemological assumptions about human action, communication and cognition" (Linell, 2003, p. 220). Bakhtin distinguishes between monologism and dialogism as two distinctive communicational modes that may affect knowledge construction and comprehension. When we speak of monologism, knowledge is understood as a given. This knowledge may be directly transmitted to the student through the teacher's authoritative word in a learning setting. When we speak of dialogism, knowledge is understood as 'emerging from the interaction of voices (...) and concerned with the construction and transformation of understanding through the tension between multiple perspectives and opinions' (Linell, 2003; Dysthe et al., 2006, p. 302). The understanding of dialogue in supervision is framed by the idea of knowledge as co-developed through multivoiced interaction. Dysthe suggests the term 'dialogical uptake' for investigating the micro-processes of dialogue (Dysthe, 1997). These perspectives on monologism and dialogism allow us to investigate how the concept of knowledge influences the dialogue in supervision.

Bakhtin distinguishes between 'the authoritative word' and internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). When giving and receiving feedback, Prior suggests tracing the interplay of the authoritative word and internally persuasive discourses where teacher and student negotiate words and meanings, since the negotiations bear witness to the student's development (Prior, 1995, p. 292). Dysthe argues that Bakhtin's concept 'offers a relevant distinction for discussing supervision practices because it combines an understanding of a person's dialogic appropriation of social language and the ways outside forces assert their influences' (Dysthe et al., 2006, p. 203). Both concepts suggest that supervision through dialogue demands the student's active participation to negotiate and transform the content into knowledge that is meaningful to the students. In their research on various supervision formats, Dysthe stresses that an important aspect of supervision concerns which communicative models are most suitable for transforming the authoritative word into an internally persuasive voice (Dysthe, 2003, p. 3).

To investigate the negotiation among multiple voices during supervision, we draw on Bakhtin's term, 'appropriation':

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a natural and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293–4)

This statement emphasises that supervision is a continuous negotiation between a person's dialogic appropriation of social language and the surrounding context that influences the dialogue. Since supervision is understood as participation in a community of practice, the dialogue is influenced at an interpersonal level in a specific supervision dialogue between the supervisor and the student and at the level of sociocultural activity that transcends the specific situation. From a Bakhtinian perspective, the supervisors have a powerful voice influenced by the voices of the organisation (school) and institution (policies). This understanding of supervision is an argument for drawing on the context when analysing the specific act of supervision. In figure two, we have captured our vision of how the student's perspective of online supervision is embedded in a larger context.

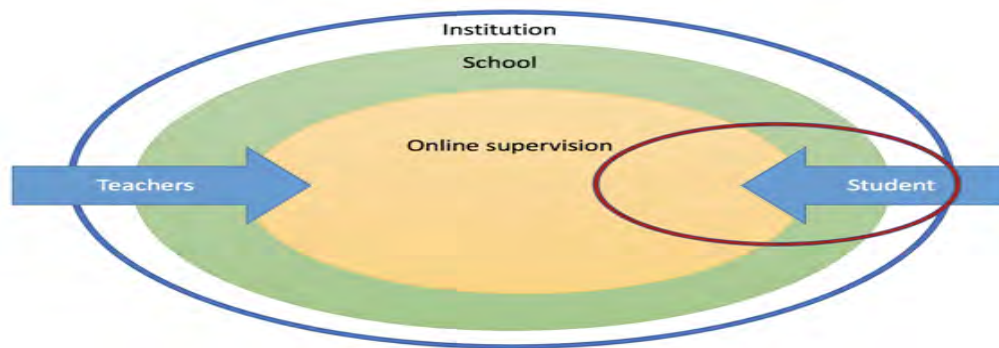


Figure 2: Illustration of the focus of this investigation

For our investigation of how dialogue in various online supervision formats supports the development of knowledge and writing, we argue that the concepts of voice, monologism, dialogism, and appropriation constitute an adequate framework.

## Data and methods

This article is based on a mixed methods approach. It includes four types of data: 1) surveys of students' experiences of online supervision (N=667) conducted in April 2020, 2) student notes, instructions, and assignments, 3) observations, and 4) interviews.<sup>7</sup> All data has been translated from Danish to English by the authors. In the translation, the authors emphasise the content of the students' answers over language. Our mixed methods approach is characterised by a 'diversity of views,' 'perspective change,' and 'complementation,' as in Green's and Bryman's taxonomies for mixed methods designs (Greene et al., 1989; Greene, 2007; Bryman, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> The University of Southern Denmark is responsible for these data and ensures that the processing of personal data takes place in accordance with the rules on data protection. The legal framework for processing these data is found in the Danish Data Protection Act §10.

Regarding the change of perspective, we tried to increase the breadth and depth of our analyses of students' online supervision experiences by moving among various perspectives or paradigms. Regarding complementation, we sought to expand and strengthen our interpretation by combining multiple data sources. This is evident in our selection of qualitative cases. We selected cases based on findings from the quantitative part of this study that showed some discrepancies with previous studies described in the section on online supervision.

The survey data were collected as part of a research project on school closures (Qvortrup, 2020b). Of the total 3342 respondents, 677 3rd year students responded to the last section concerning the SRP (Specialised Study Project) and SOP (Multi-Subject Coursework). As shown in Table 1, on the status of the students' work on their SRP/SOP at the time of the data collection, 488 students (72.1% of the 3rd year students) were completing or had completed the SRP/SOP during school closures. The responses from these 488 students form the quantitative database of the study we are presenting in this article.

	Respondents	Percent
I have not yet started to work on it	2	0.3%
I am working on it now	50	7.4%
I finished it before school closures	187	27.6%
I finished it during school closures	438	64.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 1: Third-year students' responses to the question: 'How far have you got with your SRP/SOP?'

Another central element of our data collection was based on qualitative data. In the spring of 2020, we collected data on three students selected to answer this article's research questions as part of a qualitative ethnographic doctoral project (Bang-Larsen, 2022). Data involved student notes, instructions, assignments, observation of online supervision, and interviews, as illustrated in Table 2. This part of the data was chosen to explore the discrepancies between the results of the quantitative part of the study and previous studies. As we discuss below, these discrepancies are related to accessibility and proximity.

Student	Pseudonym	School	Theme for assignment	Topics	Data: student notes, instructions and assignment	Data: observation	Data: interviews
1	Mira	School 1	The rebuilding of Rwanda	History and Social Sciences	Instructions for assignment.  Student notes after 7 days of work  Student notes from supervision  Final assignment	Observation of 2* online supervision sessions (Zoom)  5* email threads  Dates for 9 phone calls	2 interviews
1	Siv	School 2	Swinging bridges	Math and Physics	Instructions for assignment  Student notes after 7 days of work.  Student notes from supervision  Final assignment	Observation of 2* supervision sessions (Google Meet, Messenger)  6* email threads	2 interviews



3	Sofia	School 2	Terrorism – focus on Dirty Bombs	Physics and Social sciences	Instructions for assignment.  Student notes after 3 days of work  Student notes from supervision  Final assignment	Observation of 2* online supervision (1 Messenger and 1 Google Meet)  7* email threads	1 intervi ew
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Table 2: Data presenting the qualitative research

Data from the online supervision consisted of written exchanges (e.g. data from Messenger), supervision meetings using video, and notes students made during audio-based supervision such as phone calls (Hastrup, 2012). Data and methods for selecting data were based on the online supervision in the three formats that were used during the SRP/SOP supervision, following the students' perspectives (Bang-Larsen & Qvortrup, 2021). The analysis of supervision data focused on describing how the dialogue evolved in a given online format. Semi-structured interviews with the students were conducted within two weeks after the supervision incidents. The students were asked to describe their experience of supervision. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed as documents that formed a part of the student's accounts, along with our observations, student notes, and assignments (Bang-Larsen & Qvortrup, 2021). Finally, we collected documents produced by the students, including notes from supervision, the assignment in progress and the final assignment. For this part of the study, 3 students were chosen from the 9 students engaged in a larger research study (Bang-Larsen, 2021). The cases were selected because they represented three very different cases of online supervision (Cresswell, 2017), using three different online formats. Furthermore, data from these studies yielded the thickest data (Geertz, 1973). In the analysis, students, supervisors, and schools are anonymised. Data were collected with the participants' consent.

### Methodological approach – researching dialogue in online supervision

We present our strategies for analysing our data, which combine the perspectives from the theoretical framework with our methods for data analysis. Our analytical approach may be described as what Bryman (2016) and Schwartz-Shea and Dvora (2012) call an abductive approach (Bryman, 2016; Schwartz-Shea & Dvora, 2012). This strategy focus on how disturbances or conflicts in various sources (e.g. qualitative and quantitative data) are used to suggest further exploration. Using this strategy we analysed the survey data in exploratory and descriptive ways, to develop preliminary hypotheses, and to complete the qualitative analysis, respectively.

The qualitative data were investigated through narrative analysis, as understood in the tradition of Riessman (2008). When analysing the narratives we focused on two aspects:

1. We present our investigation into how supervision, in various online formats, is influenced by time and place.
2. To expand this investigation, to explore the different forms of online engagement, we analyse the dialogues during online supervision from a Bakhtinian perspective.

The first part of our narrative analysis was shaped by the results of a study of online supervision formats presented by Bang-Larsen and Qvortrup (2021). The accounts were coded and analysed according to Ongstad's categories of time, space, form, content and function (Ongstad, 2013).

Research category	Questions for observation	Data
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Time	When is the supervision taking place? Synchronous/asynchronous communication	Video- audio- and online text-based observation of supervision
Space	In which virtual space is the supervision taking place? Which physical spaces are represented during the supervision?	Video-based observation of supervision
Form	What characterises the format of the online communication?	Video- audio- and online text-based observation of supervision
Content	What is the content of the dialogue?	Video- audio- and online text-based observation of supervision  Notes from the student  Assignments  Interviews
Function	How does the student understand the purpose of the supervision session?	Video- audio- and online text-based observation of supervision  Interviews

Table 3: Illustration of the research categories and data used for the study

To investigate the development of dialogue during supervision, Bakhtin’s dialogical framework categories were added to the analysis of the micro-processes of the dialogue. The analysis of the feedback is partly informed by Hattie and Timperley’s levels of feedback (2007).

Categories for observation in the supervision dialogues	Content – Level of feedback	Identified voices	Dialogue/monologue	Signs of appropriation
Sequences				
Sequence 1 – opening sequence				
Sequence 2 –				
Sequence 3				
Sequence 4 – closing sequence				

Table 4: Illustration of research categories

## Findings

In this section we first present our findings from the entire quantitative data set, with a focus on the use of online formats and the student experience of supervision. Then we present the coding and findings of the narrative analysis, to explore the dialogical characteristics of the various online supervision formats.

As shown in table 5, a great variety of online supervision formats were used.

	Percent
On Skype	2.8%
On Teams	36.3%

On Zoom	1.4%
By telephone	23.7%
By email	27.9%
On my school's learning platform	44.7%
Other	32.6%

Table 5: 3rd-year students' answers to the question, 'What media/platforms were used for the supervision?' (you may select more than one)

A majority of students stated that they were supervised via the school's usual teaching platform, and the second-most used was the Microsoft Teams platform, which is a communication and collaboration platform that has an application for video meetings with a chat feature and file storage. Also, many students were supervised via email and telephone. Thus at least three online supervision formats were used: asynchronous written supervision (teaching platform and email), synchronous audio supervision (telephone) and synchronous video supervision (Teams, Skype and Zoom).

Table 6 shows the students' general experiences of the supervision as it took form after the transition to online settings (see Theoretical framework).

	Percent
Not at all	8.9%
To a reduced extent	27.4%
Neither/nor	17.1%
To a moderate extent	25.8%
To a large extent	18.6%
Don't know	2.3%
Total	100.0%

Table 6: 3rd year students' answers to the question: 'I have a good access to receive supervision while working on my SRP/SOP'

Table 6 shows that the online supervision did not meet all students' expectations. Just under half of the students (44.4%) found that they had good, or somewhat good access to supervision, whereas a little over a quarter (27.4%) found that this was the case to a reduced extent, and 8.9% indicated that this was not at all the case. In the open ended comments following this survey question, it is stressed by a majority of the students that they felt particularly challenged by three factors: 1) personal contact with the teacher, 2) the possibility of on-demand supervision when needed and 3) the experience of being part of a working community with the possibility of peer-to-peer guidance.

As we dove into the responses to the open-ended questions that extend the questions presented in Table 6, we reached a better understanding of the factors that helped to determine students' assessment of their opportunity for supervision. However, these answers not only presented a picture of the students' assessment of their opportunity for supervision but also explicitly and implicitly gave us an idea of students' expectations of supervision. Three themes of interest for this research emerged in the responses.

The first theme relates to the presence and dynamic dialogue. This theme includes a number of statements that address the unsatisfactory temporal dynamics. One of the students stated 'It is really hard when you write an email to your supervisor and you have to wait several days for an answer.' However, the question of time is related not only to response time but also to a lack of immediacy in relation to contact, 'e.g. if you hit a wall and are not able to get started again,' as one of the students put it. Another student explained that 'I had to write to them first and then I had to wait some time for an answer.' In addition to time, presence is linked to physical presence. One student noted that 'It's all very difficult when you cannot see each other's body language,' whereas another explained that 'It is not as easy to understand your supervisor when he is not in the same room and you can actually face each other,' and a third student suggested that 'The lack of presence may mean that you are not asked as many questions, which also means that the depth of the interaction is reduced'. This student significantly correlates visual closeness to the possibility of depth: 'All in all, one just needs to see the teacher and get answers, instead of writing on the internet.'

The second recurring theme in the open answers addresses depth, as opposed to surface. One student explained that 'it is difficult to find the head and tail of where to start. Then it is confusing to receive various messages and documents that you cannot find later if you need them.' Another student with a similar focus explained that 'a lot can be misunderstood when writing it,' and similarly, other students wrote that 'it is difficult to communicate properly so that one is sure that one's teacher understands what one is saying' and 'it is not so easy to explain to the teachers what exactly you think in relation to what you need help with'. According to one student, this may be due to the fact that 'the answers were often short and did not help much.'

Finally, a number of students indicated that the supervision normally referred or related to wider learning circles, or that in some way, they remind them of, or confirm the students' relationship to the institution as a learning community. One of the students explained that 'you do not have the same opportunity to ask classmates, etc. for advice'. Another student describes the feeling that 'you are completely alone with it'.

### *Three students' accounts of their experiences of various online formats*

The survey data made it evident that the students are receiving supervision and feedback in a wide range of online formats. The survey findings also indicated that students have very different experiences of supervision and feedback depending on the use of different formats. Our research informs us that online supervision demands an awareness of how various communication multimodalities may support online communication in a given format, and research emphasises the importance of the relationship between student and supervisor and suggests a focus on the informal aspects of supervision. The quantitative data address the questions of depth in supervision, which is of interest since research claims that textual feedback in online supervision has 'great potential' (Kumar & Johnson, 2017, p. 205). There also seems to be a gap between our data's addressing of time as a challenge, and research claiming that textual feedback in online supervision has great potential transcending time and space (Bengtson & Jensen, 2015). In order to understand how students experience online supervision, it is interesting to explore the ambiguity of these themes (e.g. depth, time and space), which are addressed in the analyses of the qualitative data. In the following cases, we first present the results of our analyses of how the transformations of time and space affect the online format (form). Furthermore, we explore how the students experienced the content of their supervision. In doing this, we gained insight into the students' understandings of how dialogues in online supervision contributed to their writing.

*Mira – an experience of video-mediated online supervision*

Mira was completing her final year of upper secondary school with a large project on the genocide in Rwanda (History and Social sciences). Mira had been at home for two weeks when she began her writing and entered the program of supervision. As shown in Table 7, Mira’s supervision took various forms, but video-based online supervision was the dominant format. Two twenty-minute online meetings were scheduled for Mira and her two supervisors.

Research category/ Format of supervision	Time	Space	Form	Content	Function
Written online communication	Asynchronous  Used for immediate requests for supervision	Use of messenger – invitation into private space	Questions	Task	Requests for answers, instructions and approval
Audio-based online communication	Synchronous  Immediate	Private space	response – confirmation /affirmation	Task and Process	Requests for answers and acknowledgement
Video-based online communication	Synchronous  Immediate response, but needs planning to schedule a meeting	Private space	Text oriented Smalltalk	Task, process, self-regulating, self-level	Requests for task-level and process discussions. Requests for acknowledgement.

Table 7: Findings concerning Mira’s experience of various online formats

The analysis of Mira’s experience of the changed conditions with respect to time and space in supervision shows that Mira felt she had fairly good access to her supervisors, with which she was very pleased. It seems very important to Mira that she may have supervision at almost any time. She also emphasises that the use of online formats in some way intertwines the supervisors’ space and her personal space.

I think online supervision has been awesome. I could call X at any time, and we spent hours on the phone (...) For some reason it also seemed quite relaxed, I sat at home in my room and there were not a whole lot of other students, waiting for me to finish or looking at me. We used screen sharing a lot, and then they [supervisors] read through passages and asked why I did this, and why I did that.... in this sense. (Mira, Interview)

As Mira emphasised in her statement, the video-based online format leaves the student in a comfortable private room with an experience of time as ‘one’s own.’ In the second video-based online supervision session, Mira requested help at the task level. The session was scheduled halfway through her writing, owing to Mira’s ‘struggling with how to inform her investigation analytically by using economic theory, not just paraphrasing the theories’ (as written in an email from Mira to her supervisors). By her request, Mira shows signs of appropriation, since the request echoes the voice of the supervisors in previous meeting, where they expressed concern about the taxonomic levels of her investigation. The online session opened with small talk about the process level and the student’s well-being. Then the social science teacher addressed Mira’s struggle (sign of a ‘dialogical uptake’ from the dialogue initiated by Mira). The supervisor invites Mira to share the screen, and the dialogue evolves around paragraphs written by the student:

...in your analysis you use descriptions of strategies used by Rwanda's government to evolve economic growth, particularly nation branding. Analysing this, you need economic theories, and I see that you use the book, *International economics*. Which theoretical conclusions from this chapter are you planning to draw on? (Mira, video-based observation)

Instead of imposing a teacher-driven monologue concerning relevant theories and concepts, the teacher uses Mira's text to invite her to explore the analytical possibilities of the framework Mira presented. As the dialogue evolves, Mira finds a way to elaborate on the analysis, by using the theoretical framework to analyse Rwandan government strategies for economic growth through nation branding. The supervisor mentions another theory from the book, Rostow's strategies for economic growth, and Mira decides to look into that as well. Mira's description of this supervision dialogue as contributing to her writing process may partly be explained by the use of screen sharing as a tool qualifying a dialogue closely related to Mira's text. The active use of the text Mira produced prompts a scaffolding dialogue. And in the final assignment, we see that Mira integrated the teacher's suggestion, which may be understood as another sign of appropriation.

At the conclusion of the online supervision, the supervisor asks Mira to recapitulate what she needs to do next. Mira informs her supervisor of her plans, and according to the observation, she emphasises the key parts of the dialogue. This part of the session addresses feedback at a self-regulating level. The supervisor's question is encouraging Mira's planning of the process and her ability to address the work in front of her. Mira ends with a sigh, emphasising that she still has work to do. Since the format allows the supervisors to see the expression on Mira's face and hear her tone of voice, the two supervisors respond to this by stating, 'You look as though this is a bit overwhelming?'. Mira responds to this, confirming that it is a bit overwhelming, but she indicates an awareness that this is expected in this part of the process. The supervisors confirm this, and add, 'but you are a fighter, a hard-working bright student, we know you can do this,' after which the meeting ends. This is clearly feedback at the self-level. Concerning the student's understanding of the function of supervision, feedback at the self-level turns out to be central and is a recurring feedback strategy throughout feedback provided to Mira. This sort of feedback may be understood as an attempt to meet and acknowledge the student as a person, in the sense that the feedback is dialogically oriented, but not towards the actual task. Nevertheless, Mira emphasises the value of this response:

I could call them [supervisors] at any time, and just have a short chat... ask how things were going... or if I had a quick question. In that sense it has been very good.... very informal...the idea that someone cares about you and is interested... They believed in me, and I had the feeling of being seen. (Mira, interview)

In this passage, Mira addresses her use of the satisfying audio-based online formats and also her need to be acknowledged as a student making her way through the difficult process of writing this assignment. She emphasises the importance of informal communication and the personal interest evidenced by the use of a communication platform involving a private space and private time. The private room and the voices of supervisors as private persons, seem important to the dialogue. And Mira emphasises how the feedback at the self-level encourages her to work. The data underlines that in this case, audio- and video-based online communication privileges this kind of feedback.

### *Siv – an experience of written online communication*

Siv's SRP covers mathematics and physics, and she was investigating swinging bridges. All her supervision was carried out online. Siv's supervisors used written online communication only. They used

text messaging on Messenger, based on the argument, that the potential of this platform is related to the possibilities of tracking text and order of communication.

Research category/ Format of supervision	Time	Space	Form	Content	Function
Written online communication	Asynchronous Lack of response  Loss of time appointed	No access to the space in which the conversation partners are communicating.  Anonymous. Consequence: experience of noncommitment.	Communication initiated only by student.	Questions and answers at task level.	According to student, supervision should support writing process and bring new perspectives to the research.

Table 8: Findings concerning Siv's experience of various online formats

The online format chosen by Siv's supervisors, introduces another sort of 'presence' than the case of Mira, since it offers no visual access to the rooms from which the participants communicate, and thus no intertwining of the supervisors' and the student's personal spaces. Siv explained that because she had no access to the supervisors' physical space, they did not appear to be engaged in the supervision. Also, this format is partly asynchronous. According to Siv's account, these conditions of time and space are challenging. In her narrative, time is an ongoing issue: lack of time; presence and time; answering on time and time stolen from her, because she did not receive the supervision time that was assigned, according to the study plan. The changed conditions of time and space seem to be crucial for Siv's account of her supervision. One might characterise her narrative as a narrative of loss.

The supervision has been quite particular because it was only online, and my supervisors insisted on using the chat function of Messenger. Sometimes I felt that it was only me posing questions, and then they answered.... in that sense, it was not really a conversation, I really missed that they did not address the specific parts of my paper, but then again, they never looked at what I was writing.... it was just questions and answers.  
(Siv, interview)

Our analysis is focused on Siv's communication with her supervisors through the chat function of Messenger. Twice during the writing period, the two supervisors separately invited Siv to participate in online supervision using the chat function of Messenger. Siv could also contact her supervisors by email. The supervision chat opened with Siv posing a question about her given research question: 'Hi, why does it [research question] address Newton's laws in the plural form, isn't it just the second law that is relevant?' The question evidently addresses feedback at the task level. The supervisor is not answering immediately and Siv requests an answer twice, with '?' and 'what is the answer?'. After 15 minutes, the supervisor replies 'I assume that the 3rd law is also relevant for defining the constant of the spring'. Siv replies with an 'ok'. After another 10 minutes, the supervisor asks, 'Is that all for now?'. Siv confirms this and leaves the chat. During the second supervision session, this conversation pattern is repeated, this time with a focus on formal aspects of the assignment, which addresses the assignments abstract. The mathematics supervision primarily addressed the formal aspect of the assignment. Siv asked 'How long is a conclusion?', the supervisor answered, and Siv posed a new question concerning the text representations versus models. This was also a request for feedback at the task level. The conversation was clearly driven by questions from the student and responses that answer the questions, but do not promote conversation. In this sense, the conversation drew on a very restricted form of dialogue, but nevertheless, the conversation showed signs of limited uptake and appropriation, since the answers were important for the student's completion of the assignment. On the other hand, this may be interpreted as a result of following a teacher's monologue.

Siv's case is significant since it demonstrated that text-based supervision is effective for replying to specific questions and confirming students on the task level. On the other hand, the data indicate a weakness of this online format, since it does not encourage conversation. Also, the format seems to focus on task-level feedback. In this sense, Siv's narrative reproduces some of the themes of the survey. She keeps returning to how the supervision disappointed her, and her expectations of supervision. Her narrative is echoing the voices of the school as an organization that has introduced the frames for supervision. Furthermore, her narrative is referring to the voices of students from other classes, and their stories of supervision, which from Siv's perspective, seem more useful. The interview addressed three aspects of supervision: 1. the desire to develop the dialogue, 2. to address the student's work at the text level, 3. to request supervision on the process – self-regulation – and perhaps even at the self-level:

The thing is, you may need supervision even though you are not aware of it. I only got supervision if I requested it, and I really wish that my supervisors reached out to me more, asked how things were working out for me, what I wrote about, whether things were okay (...) If we have had a video conference, it probably would have been much more committed... they could not just leave the room or remain silent. I really wish there was more conversation... if we had looked at what I had written, it may also have led to some sort of progress. (Siv, Interview)

With words and expressions such as, 'reach out to,' 'wish' and 'miss', Siv's statement emphasises her disappointment with the supervision. She emphasises the experience of supervision as superficial and disconnected from her need to engage in a developing dialogue that addressed aspects other than task level.

*Sofia – an experience of text-oriented feedback*

Sofia's writing assignment addresses the topic of dirty bombs (Physics and Social studies). The choice of online format was left to her supervisors. Sofia's teachers offered two formats of online supervision: written online communication and audio-based online communication with screen sharing.

Research category/ Format of supervision	Time	Space	Form	Content	Function
Written online communication	Asynchronous Emphasises that asynchronous interaction leaves time for reflection and formulating descriptions of needs	No access to the space in which the conversation partners are communicating.	Communication initiated by student.  Question/response	Feedback at task level, process level and self-regulation level	Format is seen as offering the option to communicate challenges prior to online meeting.  Plus, option for fast reply.
Audio-based online communication with screen-sharing	Synchronous  Immediate answers.  Opportunities to evolve a developing dialogue in an undisturbed time frame time	Participation from private space– safe zone  Access to voice	Dialogue initiated by, and developed by all parties involved.  Screen-sharing as basis	Feedback at task level, process level and self-regulation level	Format seen as option for developing the project.  Format seen as option for explanations of difficult elements.

Table 9: Findings concerning Sofia's experience of various online formats

The findings in the first part of our analysis confirmed that Sofia experienced a scaffolded supervision process, where the online format supported her writing process. Sofia particularly emphasised that she found the possibility of online screen sharing supportive. The format is enabling the simultaneous presence of both students and supervisors synchronously in time. Also, the format is enabling the sharing of the text establishing a sort of common ground or shared space. Contrasting the survey data, Sofia's narrative is remarkable in stressing time as a resource.



I had great difficulty with this project... how to present the possible use of a dirty bomb. For this, my physics supervisor was a great help. He set up a meeting in Google Meet with screen sharing, and we went over our case, discussed the calculations and how to present it. (Sofia, interview)

The analysis focused on two different supervision events and two different formats, since the supervisors switched between them, depending on the content addressed. The paragraph above is from observed online supervision between Sofia and her physics teacher. The session took place on day 3 and was scheduled for half an hour. The teacher started by addressing her writing 'How are you... what have you focused on in the beginning?' Sofia replied that she had made a good start and that she was currently engaged in presenting the case, about which she was a bit confused. The supervisor asked whether he could see her work, and Sofia launched screen sharing. Sofia focused the screen on her presentation of the case and her preliminary calculations, and the teacher asked how she collected her data. Sofia replied, and the supervisor explained that she needed to add this explanation to that which was already presented, as a sort of metatext. This case also illustrates how screen sharing may be used as a focal point to explore a students' written text and thereby access the student's voice and dialogue initiated by the student. The supervisor added to the writing of the student and gave instructions that improved statements the student already made. In the final assignment, we see signs of appropriation, since the case was scaffolded by a metatext that commented on access to data and data development. The session closed with the supervisor's response combining the process- and self-regulation levels, and a concern whether the problem was clear to Sofia, and whether she knew how to move forward with her assignment.

Sofia was concerned about the part of the assignment that involved the social sciences. Sofia asked how much she needed to account for the theories before including them in a discussion. Sofia started by addressing this concern in a session on Google Meet, on day seven of her writing. At this point in the process, Sofia had been down with the flu for two days, and she felt a time pressure, which troubled her. The supervisor began by asking about her health, and Sofia responded. In the interview, Sofia explained that she found such parts of the supervision 'a sort of personal investment,' apparently the sort of informal dialogue that the quantitative data set indicated that students want. Next, the supervisor asked whether she had made a schedule for her writing days, and whether they should start by looking at it. Together, they discussed the process, and the challenges Sofia had in front of her. The supervisor approved her plan and suggested that she should spend the rest of the day finishing the section that introduced the theories and then email it to him, for comments. The supervision showed a sensitivity to the student's voice and an awareness of the importance of dialogical uptake, based on both text and spoken expression. When we look at the data from the interview, it is evident that the student has found that the supervision meeting met her expectations:

My social sciences teacher really helped me out. He helped me by expressing some of the parts I struggled with... I emailed it to him, and he read it, and helped me out find ways to shorten it, what I could leave out, and so on. (Sofia, interview)

In Sofia's case, it is remarkable that the supervision combined various formats, depending on the content and the feedback requested. Feedback addressed task, process, and self-regulating levels, but throughout the supervision, we found no sign of feedback at the self-level. The use of an online format that combined audio and screen sharing clearly supported the opportunity to engage in dialogue related to the text. Furthermore, the format left the possibility of an engaging dialogue meeting the student's request for an immediate response. However, the impact of the format on the dialogue is of interest, since in this case, the dialogue was far more concerned with the written text shared on the platform than in Mira's case. One

might assume that the absence of the video-mediated picture of the student-directed the feedback more towards the process and the task, and less towards feedback at the self-level.

## Discussion

In this article, we examined how the supervision of major written assignments at Danish upper secondary schools took place during the mandatory school closures to prevent the spread of Covid-19. This article was built on a communicative approach to teaching and didactics, based on the premise that education and teaching are constantly renegotiated and re-established in response to context. We focused on how dialogical interaction in various online supervision formats supports the development of knowledge and writing among upper secondary students.

Research in this field is ambiguous in terms of our understanding of how online supervision may contribute to knowledge-development and the writing process, but part of the existing research emphasised the importance of attending to the affordances of the various online formats. This awareness was incorporated into our research design, which focused on how the students experienced the various online supervision formats. The two data sets showed a great variety in the use of different formats and very significant differences in the student's experiences of online supervision. The quantitative data suggest that at least three online supervision formats were used: written asynchronous supervision (a teaching platform and email), synchronous audio supervision (telephone), and synchronous video supervision (Teams, Skype and Zoom), and they also determined three themes that we investigated further in the qualitative data. The first is presence and dynamics in dialogues, the second is the depth of the dialogue and the third is learning circles. The qualitative data informed us of the student's perspectives on online supervision and highlighted that students emphasise the relationship established through dialogue when using online formats. From the student's perspective, a lot more than feedback on their actual writing is at stake, and they emphasise attention to the psychodynamic dimensions. Through the students' accounts, we learned of the importance of the relation-building dialogue, understood as symmetrical dialogue that expresses an interest in the student and the student's perspective. The data also informed us that students value time as a condition for engaging dialogue, access, and timeliness. Finally, the students' accounts addressed text-oriented dialogue and feedback that leads to in-depth dialogue. These results suggest that complimentary feedback at the self-level may be particularly important in the context of online writing assignments, where building self-confidence and self-efficacy is crucial for self-regulation and knowledge retention.

The dialogical perspective on online supervision proved to be important for gaining an understanding of why students find online supervision so radically different from face-to-face supervision. An important insight that emerged from our study is that the various online supervision formats offer very different features for developing student writing. Sometimes, supervision may be directed at a specific task, and the students request clear instructions or on-demand supervision. At other times, the students request text-oriented feedback, which demands active involvement with student-produced texts. And at other times, the students ask that the supervision address psychosocial dynamics, and it turns out that the supervision format must enable the sense of a personal relationship with the teacher.

In Scandinavia, most studies of students' work on large written assignments in upper secondary school have focused on literacy. Recent studies have favoured face-to-face supervision of written assignments. In this article, we have tried to shed light on online supervision. Our research suggests that an awareness of the different dialogical potentials of the various online formats may qualify the use of these tools. Data showed, that in some aspects online supervision enhances the students' sense of managing their work on the assignment. But data also showed, that improving the dialogic dimensions of online supervision of upper secondary school students is challenging for the supervisors.

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