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Doctoral School Annual Lecture 2023

Collective Academic Supervision

Diversity as a driver for learning

Helle Merete Nordentoft

Doctoral School
University of Malta

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Diversity as a driver for learning

Helle Merete Nordentoft

17 May 2023

at the Valletta Campus,
University of Malta

*To the memory of Ronald Sultana (1958 – 2023)
Professor of Educational Sociology and Comparative Education,
Director of the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research
at the University of Malta*

*Inspiring teacher, compassionate mentor and caring friend to many around the world,
great supporter of the University of Malta's Doctoral School from its inception*

Foreword

Doctoral education has a rich and varied history. Doctoral degrees originate from early forms used within Medieval universities and were based upon an apprenticeship model. These forms evolved to our common doctoral degree – the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) – which began in the nineteenth century in which a student undertook a programme of autonomous research. Effectively, the Ph.D. became the way of training people to become career academics. Students worked alongside an experienced supervisor and were guided by them, sharing experience and knowledge.

Demands brought about by research that is more complex, often interdisciplinary in nature, and which has to be completed within a set timeframe, has meant that the model has had to change. The one-to-one relationship has been replaced with one that sees members of a supervisory team – at the very least, a first supervisor and a second supervisor – taking the roles of guides and critical friends. Doctoral supervision (and assessment) has come to be seen as a form of pedagogy that requires adequate preparation and training so that newcomers to the process know the requirements for making the doctoral journey a successful one.

The supervision of doctoral students will continue to evolve as new challenges appear. We all have responsibilities to modify and develop our practice accordingly. It is in this spirit that the decision was taken that this year's keynote address at the Doctoral School's annual symposium would be dedicated to doctoral supervision, in particular the challenging but exciting concept of Collective Academic

Supervision (CAS) championed by Professor Helle Merete Nordentoft (Aarhus University, Denmark). The fact that this year's symposium was amalgamated with the first edition of the University of Malta's Research Expo ensured that this model of supervision was shared with established academics and early stage researchers alike.

Nicholas Vella

Director, Doctoral School

Post scriptum

This publication was completed the day the sad news of Prof. Ronald Sultana's passing reached us, in Malta and in Denmark. We both have fond memories of Ronald: a good man, a scholar's scholar, a giant in the field of educational sociology and career guidance. We shall remember him in the commensality ritual which followed the end of the Expo, talking about doctoral matters ... embracing life.

NV, HMN

Doctoral School Annual Lecture Series

17 May 2023

Helle Merete Nordentoft (Danish School of Education,
Aarhus University – DENMARK)

***Collective Academic Supervision: Diversity as a
Driver for Learning***

18 May 2022

André Elias Mazawi (University of British Columbia,
Vancouver – CANADA)

***"The home would be when all of us would become
strangers": Inhabiting Doctoral Supervisory Relations
under Adversity***

30 April 2021

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28 February 2020

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The Question of Doctorateness: Theory and Practice

1 March 2019

Ivan Callus (Department of English,
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The PhD, Tal-Qroqq and Campus Fiction

Collective Academic Supervision: Diversity as a Driver for Learning

Collective Academic Supervision (CAS) is a research-based and innovative model for participation and learning in higher education. It contends that diversity between different projects in a supervision group can be a driver of learning. In her keynote address, Helle Merete Nordentoft explains the rationale for the CAS model, its theoretical foundations, and how it can be put into practice within higher education.

Introduction

Thank you for an inspiring morning session. I am impressed by the magnitude and variety of research projects that have been presented at the Research EXPO until now. I was excited when Nick Vella and Ronald Sultana invited me to give a keynote address on supervision – a theme which has been a significant part of my academic life for nearly 20 years. Also, it is a theme you all can relate to because you have all been supervised and perhaps you are also a supervisor. The EXPO today clearly shows how each of you work hard to produce solid scientific arguments and answers to complex problems in a world where crises are constantly knocking on our doors. Supervision, I argue, is the workshop where these scientific arguments are crafted. In supervision great thoughts and new ideas can be born. Yet, despite its relevance, supervision remains an under researched practice and mostly lives a quiet and secluded life behind a closed door when

supervisors and supervisees meet in their one-to-one relationships. In my talk today, I will open the door and put the spotlight on this secluded practice. So, I hope that you will find my talk relevant to your practice and that it will inspire your future work as academics and supervisors/supervisees.

In my keynote address today, I am going to present a unique collective and research-based model for learning and participation in supervision called Collective Academic Supervision – CAS. Since 2009, I have developed and written about CAS in collaboration with my colleagues Rie Thomsen, Kristina Mariager-Anderson and Gitte Wichmann-Hansen (Nordentoft *et al.* 2013; Wichmann-Hansen *et al.* 2015). Until now, the model has been implemented with success in both Denmark and Norway – and who knows, after today's presentation, Malta might be the next stop?

To begin with, I would like to emphasize that CAS is not the same as group supervision. In CAS several students who write on different projects or assignments are supervised together. It can be, for instance, a group of Ph.D. students working within the same or different departments within or across different disciplines. CAS integrates and creates a dynamic between different theoretical or methodological perspectives. A key point in CAS is that differences between the participants in a supervision group are a driving force in the development of critical reflexive thinking, learning, insights.

This core idea in CAS is inspired by the Russian literary theorist Mikael Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1981). According to Bakhtin, meanings – including understandings of self and other – are produced dialectically in the tension between different and often contradictory voices. In his understanding, a voice is not a physical voice. A “voice” can be said to capture the idea of a certain perspective – be it experiential, theoretical, or methodological as embedded in a particular ideology or discourse. Bakhtin asserts that curiosity about the tensions and differences between these voices becomes a driver for learning. In other words, CAS rests on a very simple, generic, and existential idea: exploring differences between other voices and your own exposes the nature of your project. If you, for example, have chosen a qualitative methodological approach in your study and others question why you have not combined it with a quantitative approach and a survey, you must explain the strength and weaknesses of working exclusively with a qualitative approach based on your theoretical foundation. This talk, moreover, exposes differences in the scientific knowledge each methodological approach can produce.

Right now, the world urgently calls for interdisciplinary collaboration and understanding among professionals with diverse perspectives in order to produce holistic answers to complex problems. CAS provides students with academic and analytical skills as well as generic work competences when it fosters their ability to listen, question and explore differences. So, CAS goes beyond being just a model; it embodies a mindset with a powerful and simple vision: better listening

leads to better questions and interdisciplinary solutions. Today's EXPO event is a crucial step in this direction, fostering collaboration among researchers from various disciplines for holistic understanding and problem-solving.

Behind the closed door: CAS in higher education

CAS was developed in a higher education context for graduate and post-graduate students. A performance-oriented context in which professional and personal journeys are often intertwined. Thus, it is a journey involving not only about what you become but also who you become. In my own research, I have interviewed many students who constantly ask themselves:

- Am I where I am supposed to be right now?
- Am I making the right priorities?
- When is it considered to be good enough?

These students describe how they, in a one-to-one supervision practice, often hesitate to contact their supervisor. They want to fulfill the academic demands, not appear insecure and keep on good terms with their supervisor. The research we have indicates that the individualized supervisor-student relationship can be vulnerable due to an overreliance on the supervisor – particularly in post-graduate supervision; personality clashes and a feeling of loneliness are common issues reported by students (Dysthe *et al.* 2006).

In this regard, the prominent researcher Barbara Grant captures the double-edged character of supervision when she writes about the delicate zone of supervision (Grant 2003: 187):

In the delicate zone between encouragement and discipline that makes up much of supervision, the workings of identity and desire provide fertile ground for misreadings, resentments, confusions.

Only the supervisor and student know what happens behind the closed door of the supervisory room. However, my research indicates that there seems to be a certain asymmetrical pattern in the dialogues between the supervisor and student in which the expert supervisor provides students his/her opinions and/or answers to their questions (Nordentoft and Cort 2020). In this regard, CAS offers a remedy to the loneliness and difficulties in one-to-one supervision and a context in which community, transparency, and a mutual responsibility are core qualities.

CAS opens the door to ...

In CAS students share their thoughts and ideas with other students in a meaningful and systematic manner. In other words, CAS has the potential to facilitate an inclusive community with less lonely and stressed students. When students discover that they share similar emotional experiences in the supervisor process, it can be a powerful source of relief and hope. Moreover, this social community

increases motivation and students' ownership of their projects and – not least – a desire to write.

Let me tell you more about the story of CAS – how it developed and how we practise it.

The history of CAS

My career started off as a nurse and a clinical supervisor, and in my doctoral research I investigated systemic supervision in a palliative ward and how the interdisciplinary team dealt with problems relating to their practice in clinical supervision (Nordentoft 2007; 2008). In this regard, the purpose of systemic supervision is to instigate a democratic setting for analytical thinking about ways to navigate a complex practice and provide moral support and understanding from fellow colleagues.

CAS is inspired by the methodological orchestration of systemic supervision with the ambitions to create an inclusive and trustful community in which it is fine to make mistakes and ask questions. In this regard, I have especially been inspired by the ideas of the Norwegian professor Tom Andersen and his work on the reflecting team and meta-dialogue in clinical work (Andersen 1991). In the construction of CAS, the principles of supervision have been transferred and transformed into a didactic and academic learning context. Thus, CAS can be described as a hybrid between systemic

supervision and a formalized learning context in which there are certain goals to be achieved.

Two theoretical inspirations

The practice of CAS rests on two major theoretical inspirations: sociocultural learning theory by Lave and Wenger (2003) and Mikael Bakhtin's theory of dialogism (Bakhtin 1981)

BOX 1: Inspirations

Two theoretical inspirations

- Sociocultural learning theory
- Dialogism

Sociocultural learning theory

In sociocultural learning participation and learning are seen as closely interconnected. Working with this perspective on learning, I see post-graduate supervision as a crucial part in the enculturation of students into a community of practice. Learning to be an academic and taking on the academic identity and language are formed through engagement and participation in a shared practice. CAS is meant to be such a community of learning.

But the question is how it is possible to create learning processes which cut across students' differences and needs? Here the Russian

literary theorist Bakhtin provides an alternative take on dialogue and learning.

Dialogism

In the traditional understanding of a good dialogue, it is a goal you work to achieve by listening respectfully to each other. By contrast, Bakhtin has a more existential understanding of dialogue and asserts that as human beings we are always participating in a dialogue with past, present, and future voices. Each utterance feeds from a former utterance and is directed to what we want to achieve in the future. So, for Bakhtin, a voice is not a physical voice. Rather, the term “voice” signifies a certain perspective or point of view.

Bakhtin’s conception of dialogue is called dialogism, and in dialogism knowledge is seen as emerging from an interaction of and tension between different voices. The Norwegian professor Olga Dysthe and her colleagues capture this idea when they state that: *‘It is the tension between diverging voices that creates the potential for new understanding’* (Dysthe et al. 2006: 314) Tensions inform us what is a stake for participants in a dialogue. So, instead of trying to solve and mediate a tension, it is an important point that these tensions have potential to facilitate new understandings (Phillips, 2011).

In CAS, we advocate that students practise curiosity when they are confronted with something they do not understand – or may consider to be completely strange. They are encouraged to ask questions and

to make fellow students expand on their rationale. In accordance with other great learning theorists like, for instance, John Dewey and Jack Mezirow (Dewey 1933[1998]; Mezirow 1998), we believe there is a huge learning potential in situations where you are confronted with something unfamiliar, challenging or irritating.

From vision to practice: three principles.

So, you may ask, how do we practise these superior ideals about diversity and learning? How do we translate them into a day-to-day CAS practice in higher education? During the last 14 years my colleagues and I have gradually developed and put together a toolbox to facilitate both supervisors' and students' learning processes in the collective supervision room. To summarize, the practice of CAS rests on three main principles I will present in the following paragraphs:

BOX 2: From vision to practice

Three principles.

1. Rituals
2. Switching between speaking, listening, and writing positions
3. Imitatio

First principle

In the work with differences as a driving force in learning processes, creating rituals is a core principle. A ritual is a set of actions that are performed in a prescribed manner with a specific purpose or a specific

meaning. Throughout history, religious, social, or cultural rituals have played an important role in how we attach meaning and a sense of connection to something larger than ourselves (Michaels 2006). In the context of CAS, rituals are used as a principle to enforce this sense of belonging and importantly to create a trustful atmosphere in which it is okay to be curious, ask question and comment on fellow students' utterances. From experience and research, we know that many students are insecure and reluctant to ask questions in a collective forum. In our experience, rituals, and predictability of what is going to take place and what is expected of students – and may I add – also supervisors, increase their well-being and inclination to test our new ideas or make daring comments.

Good beginnings are important. Therefore, I always send a supervisor letter in an email to the students before the first meeting in CAS. In this letter, I introduce myself, the rationale of CAS and my preferences as a supervisor. In the letter I answer questions that I know from experience, most students have: What is CAS and what is the rationale for and benefit of being supervised in a group and not individually? To counter objections and ideas about CAS as a part of an economic cost-cutting measure, I emphasize that CAS is a theoretically substantiated and research-based model.

During the first two sessions, an overall plan for and a repetitive structure of the sessions are created including preparation for CAS sessions and peer-feedback in between sessions. Often, I suggest a

plan based on my previous experiences, but students are also invited to contribute with ideas and suggestions for rituals. Moreover, I invite a student from a previous supervision group to join us on more than one occasion to share her experiences with the group. In what follows, I give an example from my supervisor practice on how I have worked with rituals in a CAS session.

In the rituals I have developed as a supervisor, I consider both good beginnings and satisfactory closures as crucial elements in the structure of a session. Specifically, this means that inspired by a clinical supervision practice I work with rounds in the beginning and end of a session. Because each student is expected to speak up in the rounds, they actively participate and become part of the group

In the opening round, all students formulate their response to two questions: What do I need to discuss today? What have I learned when the session is over? In their response to the second question, students are prompted to reflect on why these questions are important to discuss for their chosen topics. What kind of knowledge is needed? If a student, for instance, wants to discuss how he can examine how social media affects how young people vote in a survey, the follow-up question makes him reflect why this question is important and prioritize what he needs to learn - i.e., what theoretical, methodological, or practical knowledge he must acquire to proceed with his project.

When I am supervising, I write students' questions and learning points on a white board. To ensure the quality of the session, I return to these points in the closing round, drawing on Bakhtin's ideas about learning. During the closing round, I ask each student to revisit their initial questions and knowledge requests and encourage them to reflect on their learning journey. This includes identifying differences between their opening questions and insights they are taking away from the session.

Probably, there will be unanswered questions or new questions arise. In this regard, the closing of the session also signifies an opening. I, therefore, encourage each student to reflect on the following: What questions do I need to investigate and what should be my next step? What ideas do I have for peer-feedback before next session? This next step can be as simple as visiting the library or as significant as rethinking one's theoretical approach. The key is to keep the flow and energy in the project.

BOX 2: Rituals – an example from CAS

Before CAS:

- Good beginnings are important. Supervisor letter: Personal introduction to supervisor and CAS

During CAS:

Rounds and quality: All students in the group one by one respond to the questions below

- Opening: What do I need to discuss today? What have I learned when the session is over?

- *Closing*: Returning to and reflecting on the difference between the opening questions and “take-home insights”, and then formulating the question: What is my next step and ideas for peer-feedback?

Second principle

Working with differences in learning practices can sometimes appear confusing and potentially hinder learning processes. In normal dialogues, we often listen and simultaneously consider our response leading to a divided attention and reduced concentration on active listening. To address this, the second principle involves switching between speaking, listening, and writing positions, which helps scaffold peer dialogues about differences. By separating speaking and listening positions, we facilitate better listening thereby enhancing questioning and learning practices. This switching provides time for students to listen and reflect on differences and tensions between different voices in the group. From a socio-cultural perspective on learning, this systematic approach enhances the learning potential because it ensures that everybody in the group participates and gets a chance to speak in an equal manner, similar to the first principle involving the rounds.

In the following, I provide an example of how I work with this principle drawing inspiration from Tom Andersen’s work on reflective team dialogues in systemic supervision (Andersen 1991). In a reflective

team dialogue, the positions of speaking, writing, and observation/listening are separated. In CAS, this translates to supervisor engaging with the focus-student about her problems and their request for the up-coming team reflection while the rest of the group (the reflective team) listens. In CAS, each student has a peer-partner responsible for taking written notes when the focus-student talks with the supervisor. After the initial talk between the supervisor and focus-student, the students in the reflective team are asked to listen and comment on the focus-student's requests for reflection.

During the reflective team discussions, the focus-student sits with her back to the team and takes notes. Not having to face or comment or answer on the reflections of her enhances her concentrate and listening. If/when new questions do come up in the team reflection, students are told that it is just as interesting to ponder why they are posed, where they come from as it is to answer them right away. Perhaps they can fuel the progression in the student's writing process after the CAS session.

Finally, after the team reflection, the supervisor returns to the focus-student and asks her: What are your thoughts now, and what is your next step? Meanwhile, one of the peers in the group takes notes and documents her writing plans.

Third principle

The final principle in our practice of CAS is "*imitatio*". The term

is derived from Latin and means ‘to imitate’ as opposed to ‘to plagiarize’. Imitation serves as a fundamental principle in learning – from mastering a language to mastering academic skills (Kymiss and Poulson 1990). Within academia we acknowledge that we build on the work of other scientists and emphasize the significance of embedding our studies within the context of their work. From this perspective, writing transcends being merely a personal and professional endeavour; it also resembles a craft that can be acquired by dissecting and de-coding the context-specific attributes of various forms of academic writing, such as reports, articles, and dissertations – much like a bricklayer learns to construct a house. Consequently, in the CAS framework, *imitatio* implies de-coding linguistic, discursive and rhetorical skills in an academic community.

The work with *imitatio* in CAS is inspired by John Swales (Swales 2008), a linguist known for his work in the field of genre analysis in academic contexts. According to Swales, the concept of genre refers to texts that have a specific communicative purpose and follow certain rhetorical and contextual patterns. As a result, genres emerge from specific social, cultural, and communicative contexts. Applying the idea of *imitatio* to practice, students in CAS learn to adapt the academic “handicraft” and produce better texts in collaboration with other students and their supervisors. They engage in the analysis of academic texts, such as former assignments and scientific articles, to identify their rhetorical and formal qualities. For instance, they examine how formal requirements are/can be effectively translated into text, how a good introduction should be crafted, and how to

structure a relevant discussion. Through this process, students' tacit and normative knowledge and assumptions about what constitutes good academic texts come to the surface and become the foundation for the supervision process.

BOX 4: An example of how *imitatio* can be integrated into CAS

CAS	Theme	Content	Preparation
1	Introduction and planning of sessions	Introduction to CAS Negotiation of plan for and communication in (peer-feedback – written/oral) and between sessions (online and face-to-face) Peer feedback on research questions	Upload <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written presentation and motivation for your topic • Suggestions to your research question • Feedback requests
2	Scientific argumentation	From content to format: scientific argumentation in practice Data-session	Upload <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scientific article you consider to be good and describe the reasons why in a page or so • Produce a preliminary draft for an outline of an article you want to/are currently writing • Question regarding theoretical and methodological issues • Feedback requests
3	?	?	To be planned
4	?	Could be: what is a good discussion?	To be planned. Could be: Find examples of good discussions

Resistance to CAS: Three academic myths and new horizons

By now you may wonder: Is there no resistance to or challenges with/in CAS? Well, yes there is, and in the final part of my talk, I address these challenges. CAS offers an alternative route to learning

and the intellectual journey of graduate and post-graduate students. However, this route also challenges and alters traditional positions of both supervisors and students in the supervision room. On the one hand, supervisors must learn to balance their usual expert position with a facilitator position in their supervision. Students, on the other hand, must get used to and see the potential in having less supervisor-dialogues and engage in more peer-to-peer dialogues. In addition, CAS addresses and opposes three inherent myths of how academic quality is created.

BOX 5: Myths in academia

First: Solitude facilitates autonomy and independent thinking. Physical and individual face-to-face supervision is better than group supervision.

Second: University professors are also qualified supervisors (= they do not need competence development).

Third: You get better answers and reflections from supervisors than from fellow students.

The first myth

The first myth proposes that solitude fosters autonomy and independent thinking leading to an assertion that physical and individual face-to-face supervision is superior to group supervision. However, as elucidated until now, the core idea of CAS is founded on the belief that students benefit from collaborative learning when the supervision room is systematically structured.

The second myth

The second myth posits that university professors are automatically qualified supervisors and do not need formal education or training in supervision. Former research, including my own findings, indicates, that supervisors often replicate the one-to-one supervisory dynamics they themselves experienced even in the absence of specific training in supervision (Nordentoft and Cort 2020). Nonetheless, supervision is a critical and essential learning practice in academia, demanding skill, insight, and practice just like any other facet of academia. In all forms of collective supervision platforms, including CAS, a pivotal supervisor competence lies in their capacity to delicately balance the roles of an expert who provides solutions and a facilitator who prompts critical reflections by challenging assumptions (Wichmann-Hansen *et al.* 2015).

CAS demands a repositioning of supervisors, involving a transition from their position of authoritative expertise to one that is more facilitative and less authoritarian in nature. However, it is worth noting that it is not all academics, even those well-versed in their respective fields of study, are inclined to take on this role. The skill of knowing not only how but also when to ask a question and, importantly, when to offer an answer is truly undervalued. Roland Christensen (Christensen 1991) a prominent figure in pedagogy and an influential advocate of case method of teaching at Harvard Business School refers to this skill as “instant artistry”. It might be worth contemplating whether more questions should remain unanswered? (See Box 6 for further insights.)

BOX 6: What is a good question?

Roland Christensen refers to Ciardi (Ciardi 1972) when he advocates the importance of (asking) good questions:

A good question is never answered;
It is not a bolt to be tightened into place;
But a seed to be planted and to bear more seed;
Toward the hope of greening the landscape of ideas.

Following the argumentation above, the question is not if competence development of supervisors is relevant, but rather how it can become relevant in an academic context. Academics are experts within their respective fields of study, and their primary focus is on their own research rather than investing more time in learning about supervision. However, I contend that it is important to address this issue and find ways to make competence development of supervisors relevant and valuable. Previous research into peer collaborations processes in academia suggests that such processes can be very fruitful, not only in enhancing professional development but also in fostering collegiality. By creating opportunities for supervisors to engage in peer collaboration and competence development activities, we can facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experiences and best practices. Such initiatives can enrich the supervision practices, benefit the students, and contribute to the overall academic community.

If you are interested in practicing CAS, I highly recommend teaming up with a colleague and collaborating in the supervision process. From

experience, I have found it enriching and a rewarding experience to work together with a colleague in the supervision room. By doing so, you not only develop your own supervisory skills but you also serve as good role models for students, demonstrating the value of peer collaboration in academia. However, to ensure the long-term success of peer collaboration learning processes, it is crucial to develop a supportive, constructive, and collegial culture. Paying attention to anxieties and concerns the academic staff may have regarding peer-collaboration is essential (Campbell *et al.* 2019). Creating an environment where staff feel comfortable and encourages to engage in CAS fosters a positive learning atmosphere and promotes the implementation of CAS principles.

The third myth

The third and last myth concerns what students think about knowledge, specifically who holds it and how they can access it in higher education. This myth suggests that students tend to believe they can get better answers and insights from their supervisors rather than their peers. Traditionally, research points out that due to the growing market focus in higher education, students often see knowledge as something tied to authority (Gore 1995). Students' satisfaction with assessment and feedback is, therefore, often influenced by their embedded beliefs about the nature of knowledge. In many cases, knowledge is viewed as certain and uncontested, leading students to expect a higher level of feedback from an expert supervisor. When students are asked to accept feedback from their peers it disrupts a hidden didactic contract in an academic context dictating how both

parties should or should not behave (McGarr and Clifford 2013). This contract governs the expected behaviour of students and supervisors, emphasizing a more authoritative relationship with more feedback. CAS challenges this traditional dynamic by promoting peer-to-peer dialogues and co-constructed knowledge. Furthermore, access to the world wide web and lately artificial intelligence in higher education challenges hierarchical understandings of knowledge (Nichols 2017). Still, disrupting the traditional didactic contract in academia is a difficult task, as it is deeply shaped by historical and cultural norms. When practising CAS, we are not only talking about acquiring new skills, such as giving peer feedback, but we are also talking about instigating a fundamental shift in the peer collaboration culture. Fortunately, there is ample research to support the development of a peer learning culture and, so far, the implementation of CAS in both Norway and Denmark have been a resounding success. However, changing university cultures is a gradual process that requires time and commitment. In this process, the involvement of former students can be extremely valuable. Inviting them to share their experiences about CAS can provide important insights on how CAS is experienced from a student perspective. Furthermore, it is crucial to consistently inform students participating in CAS about each step in the process. Clearly, communicating what is expected of them, why CAS is relevant to their learning journey, and what they can gain from participating in CAS are essential elements for fostering a positive and engaged learning experience.

As I conclude my keynote, I would like to share a tale that I often tell students when I introduce CAS. This tale, more than many words,

beautifully illustrates the importance and value of creating an academic community where students care about each other and share a mutual responsibility in creating a fruitful learning context.

Two men are walking together. The first man says to the other man, "Do you want to see what it's like in hell?"

The second man hesitates and responds, "That sounds awful, but okay, let me have a look."

The first man opens the door to a room where a group of people is sitting around a big bowl of porridge. However, they all look terrible. They are skinny, their bones are sticking out, and their eyes lack expression and appear empty.

You may ask, "Why has this happened?"

Then the man observes that their spoons are too long for them to reach their mouths and eat the porridge.

The first man closes the door and says to the other man, "Now, perhaps you want to see what it looks like in heaven?"

"Yes, indeed, I would," said the other man.

"What do you think it looks like in heaven?"

The man opens the door to a room where there is also a group of people sitting around a big bowl of porridge. However, the atmosphere in this room is lively and warm. People are talking and laughing.

You may ask, "Why?"

The spoons are just as long as they were in the other room, but here, the group is feeding each other with them.

The tale illustrates the huge contrast between heaven and hell and the importance of compassion and cooperation. Importantly, it highlights how a small change in perspective and behavior can lead to vastly different outcomes for individuals in seemingly similar situations.

In hell, people are suffering because they are unable to feed themselves due to the long spoons. They are trapped in a state of misery and despair, each trying to eat from the communal bowl of porridge without success. In heaven, on the other hand people are happy and content because they have learned to feed each other, and this social act of cooperation creates a positive and harmonious environment. Thus, the tale reminds us how much the conditions of our lives are influenced by our individual attitudes and actions. So, the hope is that with an open attitude we can work together across differences and create a more “heavenly” atmosphere in which we discover better solutions to complex problems even in challenging situations.

In my opinion, it is underestimated how much students can contribute to each other’s growth and learning. Furthermore, when supervisors are open to stepping down from the traditional expert position and embracing a more collaborative approach, they can create an atmosphere where students feel empowered to share their thoughts more openly.

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